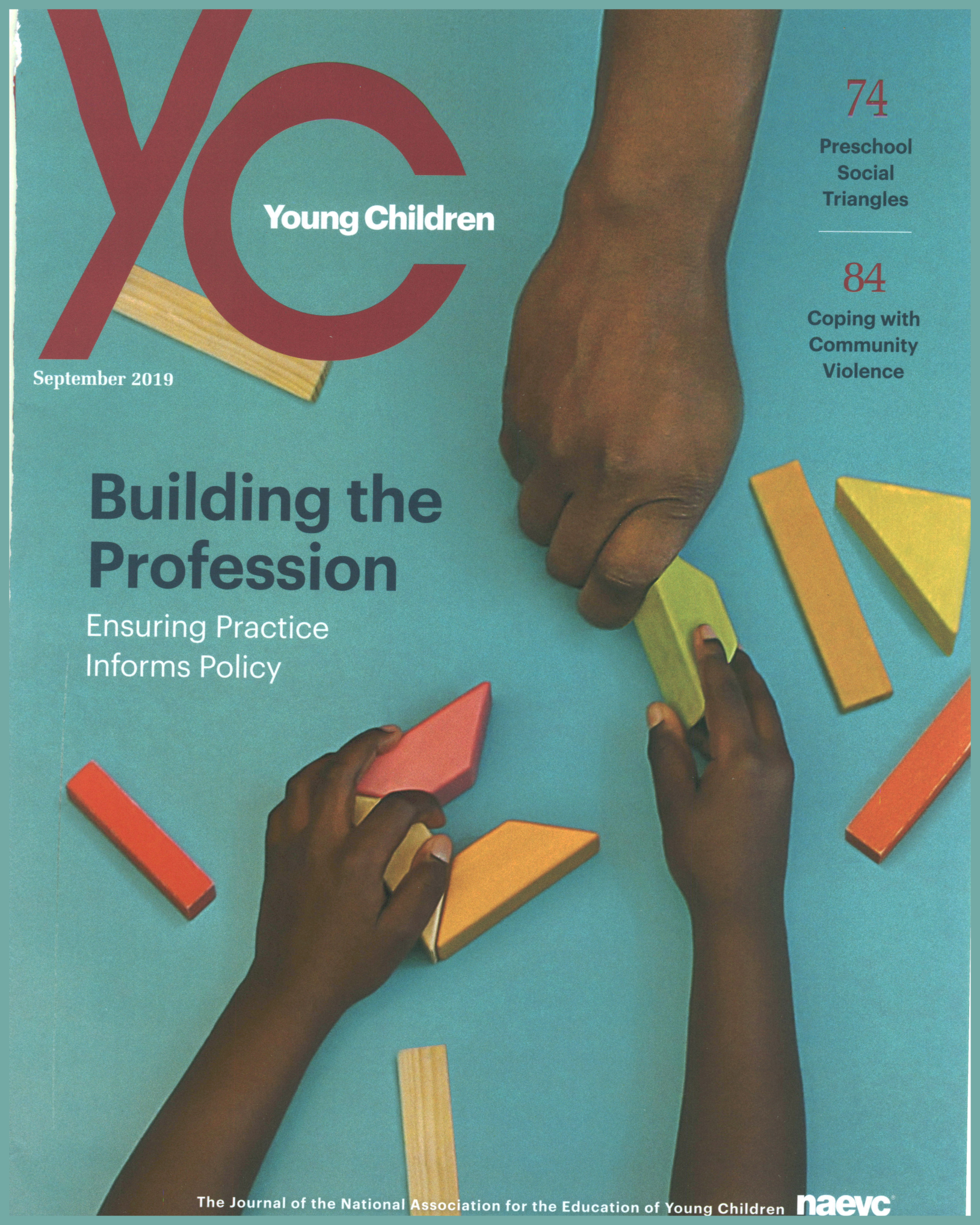

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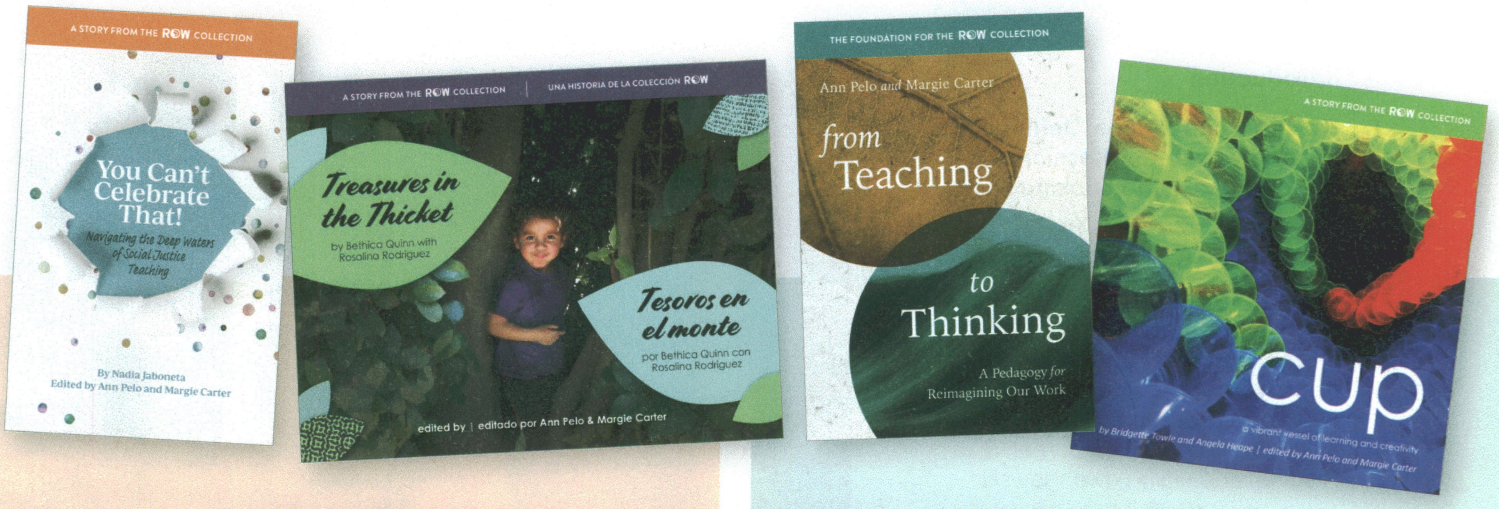

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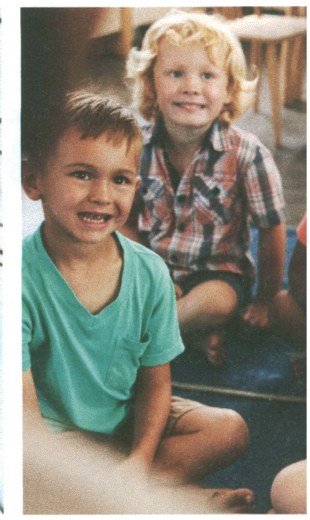

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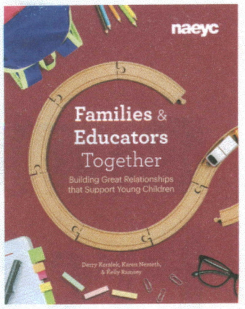

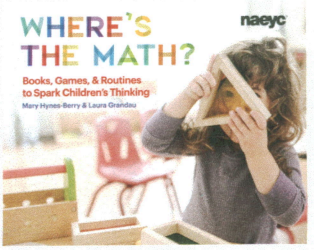

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Lisa Hansel
YC Editor in Chief

Building the Profession

Ensuring Practice Informs Policy

Vulnerageous. That combination of *vulnerable* and *courageous* perfectly describes the up-and-coming leaders I met at NAEYC's Professional Learning Institute in June, so I was happy to hear the word spread throughout the conference. From a panel with recent graduates of EDvance at San Francisco State University to hallway conversations to an aspiring author who came to the Writing for NAEYC session, I heard that word—*vulnerageous*—over and over.

It jumped out at me because it captured how so many early childhood professionals—mostly young women of color—are juggling work, college, and family to gain the experience and education they need to become expert educators with strong voices. They're identifying what they want to learn and finding mentors. They're owning their strengths and taking on coaching and director positions so they can help others. They're becoming advocates, realizing that policymakers need to hear their ideas. That's vulnerageous—and it's exactly the leadership that the early childhood field needs to become the well-respected and well-compensated profession the current workforce deserves.

This *Young Children* cluster is dedicated to all the vulnerageous young leaders. They truly are building the profession.

This cluster begins with Rhian Evans Allvin, NAEYC's chief executive officer. In "Defining Moments in Our Profession: Looking Back, and Looking Forward," she explains NAEYC's efforts through Power to the Profession to place educators' experiences and ideas front and center in the nationwide push to ensure that all early childhood educators have the educational opportunities, professional recognition, and compensation they deserve.

Next, Marica Cox Mitchell and Lauren Hogan use their personal experiences in teaching and policy-making to call for all educators to also be advocates. In "Flipping the Script: Educators Driving Public Policy," they explain why policy must be shaped by practice and offer several practical ideas for educators who are ready to be vulnerageous and have their ideas heard.

Focusing on individual programs and communities, in "Organizing Early Education for Improvement: Voices from the Field on Essential Supports," Debra M. Pacchiano, Maureen R. Wagner, and Holly Lewandowski take an in-depth look at what it means to build the profession in each and every center and school. Comparing sites based on children's outcomes, they found that "high-performing sites had organizational contexts far more supportive of teaching, learning, and family engagement," and they describe how empowering leaders, teachers, and families can lead to higher quality practices and a better environment for children.

"Creating a Work Environment That Supports Staff Retention" offers a more personal look at a major challenge for the early education profession. After spending time with a director who has succeeded in reducing staff turnover, Nicole R. Hylton and Jennifer A. Vu share many of the little and big steps this director takes to show staff members that they are valued, respected, and appreciated.

Turning to the critical need for more early childhood educators who are men, Kirsten Cole, Jean-Yves Plaisir, Mindi Reich-Shapiro, and Antonio Freitas describe their findings from a two-year study in "Building a

Gender-Balanced Workforce: Supporting Male Teachers." Their work offers insights for recruitment and retention—especially given the bias and isolation that male early educators face.

The rest of this cluster explores building the profession through new avenues for teacher preparation and professional development. In "Applying Knowledge to Practice: How Degree Apprenticeships Support Early Educators," Alison Lutton offers a case study of an apprenticeship program in Philadelphia that enables early childhood educators to earn associate degrees. Their on-the-job and course-based learning are coordinated, and their wages increase as they meet specific benchmarks. There are mentors and counselors available throughout, and the apprenticeship is part of an aligned career pathway leading to a bachelor's degree and state teacher licensure.

This deep dive into building the profession ends with a pair of articles on using videos to engage in teacher-directed, individualized professional development. Rachel E. Schachter and Hope K. Gerde show how powerful it can be to watch short clips focused on one interaction or on just a few children. In "Personalized Professional Development: How Teachers Can Use Videos to Improve Their Practice," several prekindergarten teachers share their reactions to seeing their own teaching. They also reflect on their practice to identify children's needs (like filling gaps in background knowledge) and to make small shifts to increase engagement (like waiting a little longer for children to share their ideas).

In "Preparing for Evaluation with Video Self-Reflection," Michelle Grantham-Caston and Cynthia DiCarlo follow one educator as she nervously prepares to be evaluated. Although in the beginning the educator does not welcome the idea of recording her teaching, she finds that regular, video-based self-evaluation and reflection completely shifts her views on formal evaluations. What used to be anxiety-provoking sessions become opportunities to further her self-directed professional growth.

For all the educators who've ever thought quietly to themselves, "This would work better if only . . ." this issue is your call to action. Share your ideas. Build your profession. Be vulnerageous.

—Lisa Hansel

Is your classroom full of children's artwork? We would love to feature it in *Young Children*! See the link at the bottom of the page or email **editorial@naeyc.org** for details.

Children in Heather Cedrone's preschool class used natural materials to create their own version of the very hungry caterpillar.

We'd love to hear from you!

Send your thoughts on this issue, and on topics you'd like to read about in future issues of *Young Children*, to editorial@naeyc.org.

Would you like to see your children's artwork featured in these pages? For guidance on submitting print-quality photos (as well as details on permissions and licensing), see **NAEYC.org/resources/pubs/authors-photographers/photos**.

Defining Moments in Our Profession: Looking Back, and Looking Forward

Rhian Evans Allvin | *Chief Executive Officer*

In 2000, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development* was released by the National Research Council. For the field of early childhood education, this report was a game changer. It gave us the scientific foundation to confidently assert that the most crucial period of brain development takes place during the first five years of a child's life. The report also set the stage for advocacy efforts leading to increased public investments in early childhood education. Nearly every state now invests in preschool, for example, and Congress recently made the single largest increase in funding to child care in history.

But it has been a steep hill to climb—and far too many children, families, and educators have been left at the bottom.

Once again, however, the National Research Council is spurring progress—and this time, the focus is on early childhood educators and the profound impact they have on children's lives. In the NRC's groundbreaking report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*, we have a comprehensive summary of how critical the first eight years of life are, with a significant

It has been a steep hill to climb—and far too many children, families, and educators have been left at the bottom.

Momentos decisivos en nuestra profesión. Miramos hacia atrás y hacia el futuro

Rhian Evans Allvin | *Directora Ejecutiva*

El National Research Council (Consejo Nacional de Investigación) publicó en 2000 *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development* (*De neuronas a vecindarios. La ciencia del desarrollo infantil*). Para el campo de la educación infantil, este informe marcó un punto de inflexión. Nos dio el fundamento científico con que afirmar con confianza que el periodo más crítico del desarrollo cerebral ocurre durante los primeros cinco años de la vida del niño. El informe también preparó el camino para los esfuerzos de abogacía que llevaron a inversiones públicas aumentadas en la educación infantil. Ahora casi todos los estados invierten en el preescolar, por ejemplo, y el Congreso aprobó hace poco el aumento de fondos para el cuidado infantil más grande de toda la historia.

Pero ha sido una montaña empinada que subir—y demasiados niños, familias y educadores han quedado abandonados al pie.

No obstante, el National Research Council (NRC) está incitando progreso de nuevo—y esta vez, el enfoque está en los educadores de la primera infancia y el impacto profundo que tienen en las vidas de los niños. En el informe revolucionario

new focus on the decisive role early childhood educators play in helping children to realize their fullest potential.

The report painstakingly describes the foundational development and learning that occurs in those years, and the need for early childhood educators to have the knowledge, skills, and competencies to maximize this period. Far from simply "minding the kids," early childhood educators must understand how children develop skills and habits in the areas of

- Self-regulation and inhibitory control
- Self-awareness and self-management
- Responsible decision making
- Social awareness and relationship skills
- Social and emotional development and mental health
- Short-term working memory

de NRC *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation* (*La transformación de la fuerza laboral para los niños entre el nacimiento y los 8 años de edad. Un fundamento unificador*), tenemos un resumen exhaustivo de lo crítico de los primero ocho años de la vida, con un enfoque nuevo y significativo en el papel decisivo que desempeñan los educadores de la primera infancia en ayudar a los niños a realizar su máximo potencial.

El informe describe minuciosamente el fundamento del desarrollo y el aprendizaje que ocurre en dichos años, y la necesidad de que los educadores de niños pequeños tengan los conocimientos, habilidades y competencias con que maximizar este periodo. Mucho más allá de simplemente "cuidar a los chicos", los educadores infantiles deben comprender cómo los niños desarrollan habilidades y costumbres en las áreas de

- Autorregulación y control inhibitorio
- Consciencia de sí mismo y automanejo
- Toma responsable de decisiones

- Attention-shifting and the ability to direct attention
- Cognitive flexibility
- Statistical learning and understanding of causal influence
- Interrelationships between language and mathematics
- Physical development, health, and nutrition

In addition to this list of complex building blocks, which form the foundation for children's learning and development well into adulthood, early childhood educators must honor families and actively engage in partnering with them, understand the effects of adults' language on children's cognition, and appropriately respond to the stressors of economic adversity.

At NAEYC, we know that all of this learning and growth must occur in developmentally appropriate environments that reflect and value the cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of families in each community.

Ultimately, *Transforming the Workforce* makes a compelling case that being an early childhood educator is complex and challenging. In order to realize the full

- Consciencia social y aptitudes para relaciones interpersonales
- Desarrollo social y emocional, y salud mental
- Memoria funcional de corto plazo
- Capacidad de cambiar la atención y la habilidad de dirigirla
- Flexibilidad cognitiva
- Aprendizaje estadístico y la comprensión de la influencia causal
- Interrelaciones entre el lenguaje y las matemáticas
- Desarrollo físico, salud física y nutrición

Además de esta lista de los bloques de construcción complejos que forman la base del aprendizaje y el desarrollo de los niños hasta bien entrada la adultez, los educadores infantiles deben honrar a familias y participar activamente en colaborar con ellas, comprender el efecto del lenguaje de los adultos en la cognición infantil y responder de manera apropiada a los elementos estresantes de la adversidad económica.

Sabemos en NAEYC que todo este aprendizaje y crecimiento debe ocurrir en ambientes apropiados para el desarrollo que reflejen y valoren la diversidad cultural, racial, étnica y lingüística de las familias en cada comunidad.

Básicamente, *Transforming the Workforce* argumenta convincentemente que ser educador infantil es complejo y desafiante. A fin de realizar todos los beneficios y el potencial económico de la

It is incumbent upon all of us to advocate for compensation that promotes a lifetime career in the profession.

benefits and economic potential of early education for young children, their families, and society, we have to put the right structures, policies, and supports in place to ensure that well-prepared and well-compensated early childhood educators are in each and every program, in all settings and all states across the country.

Inspired by the research in this report, 15 national early childhood organizations came together in 2017 through an initiative we called Power to the Profession (a name chosen to emphasize our commitment to centering the perspectives and expertise of educators). Our goal was to create a unified framework that defines a professional field of practice for early childhood educators. After three years of effort and more than 10,000 early childhood educators contributing their expertise, a shared framework will come out this year that includes agreement on

- The name of the profession
- The roles and responsibilities of the profession
- One set of defined competencies for what all early childhood educators must know and be able to do
- A professional structure with three levels of preparation to serve three scopes of practice
- A compelling compensation structure tied to the three levels
- The infrastructure, supports, and accountability required of and needed by institutions of higher education, early childhood educators, professional organizations, employers, the federal government, and state and local governments

Without public investment, children who benefit most from early experiences get left behind.

educación infantil para los niños pequeños, sus familias y la sociedad, *tenemos* que establecer las estructuras, las políticas y los apoyos correctos para asegurar que haya educadores bien preparados y bien pagados en cada uno de los programas para la primera infancia, en todo tipo de ambiente y en cada uno de los estados del país.

Ispiradas por la investigación detallada en el informe, 15 organizaciones nacionales de la primera infancia se unieron en 2017 mediante una iniciativa que llamamos Power to the Profession (Revalorizar la Profesión)—un nombre escogido para enfatizar nuestro compromiso con centrar las perspectivas y pericias de los educadores. Nuestra meta era crear un marco unificador que definiera un campo profesional de práctica para los educadores de niños pequeños. Después de tres años de esfuerzo y la contribución de la pericia de más de 10,000 educadores infantiles, un marco compartido saldrá este año e incluirá acuerdo en cuanto a

- El nombre de la profesión
- Los papeles y responsabilidades de la profesión
- Un solo grupo de competencias definidas para lo que todos los educadores infantiles deben saber y poder hacer

At the core of this initiative and the resulting shared framework is the idea that the early childhood education profession must own and define its accountability. Educators' responsibility is to the children and families they serve, and to the taxpayers who fund their work.

We've all heard the phrase "With great power comes great responsibility." Likewise, with great accountability must come commensurate compensation. It is not only acceptable to but incumbent upon all of us to expect and advocate for compensation and benefits that promote and enable a lifetime career in the profession. Accountable, professional early childhood educators should be able to support their families without having to rely on public assistance, as so many do today.

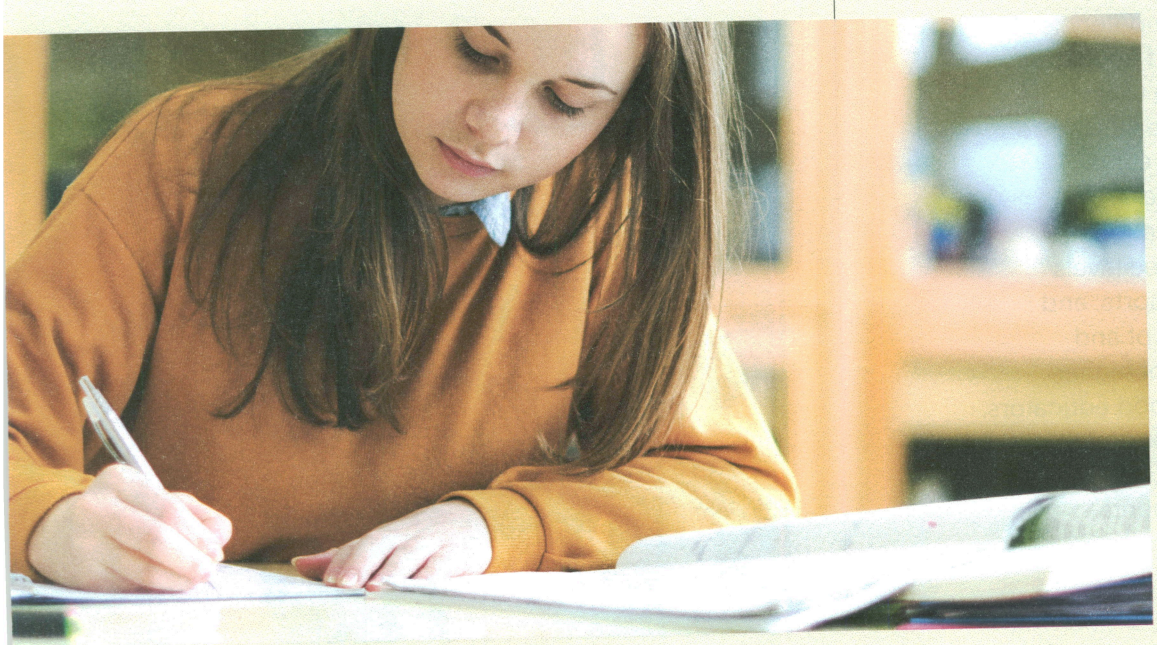
Now, unified, we roll up our sleeves and work with communities and states across the country, and with the federal government, to embed this shared framework in our early childhood systems and structures. Let's be frank: to make all of this work, substantially more public investment is required. Without this recognition of the societal benefits of high-quality early childhood education, the

- Una estructura profesional con tres niveles de preparación para servir tres ámbitos de práctica
- Una estructura de sueldos convincente y relacionada con los tres niveles
- La infraestructura, los apoyos y la responsabilidad que se requieren de y que necesitan los institutos de educación superior, los educadores infantiles, las organizaciones profesionales, los empleadores, el gobierno federal y los gobiernos estatales y locales.

Al corazón de esta iniciativa y el marco compartido que resulta de ella es la idea que la profesión de la educación infantil debe poseer y definir su responsabilidad. La responsabilidad de los educadores es con los niños y familias a quienes sirven y con los contribuyentes que financian su trabajo.

Todos hemos oído la frase "Con gran poder viene gran responsabilidad". Asimismo, con gran responsabilidad debe venir un sueldo proporcional. Más que solo aceptar esta idea, nos corresponde a todos esperar y abogar por sueldos y beneficios que promuevan y posibiliten carreras de por vida en la profesión. Los educadores infantiles responsables y profesionales deberían poder mantener a sus familias sin tener que depender de asistencia pública, como hacen tantos en la actualidad.

Hoy, unificados, subimos las mangas y colaboramos con comunidades y estados por todo el país, además de con el gobierno federal, para integrar este marco compartido en nuestros sistemas y estructuras de la primera infancia. Seremos francos: para hacer que todo esto funcione, se requiere un aumento considerable de la inversión pública. Sin el reconocimiento de los beneficios societales de la educación infantil de alta calidad, el mercado no puede ofrecer a las familias el cuidado y la educación infantiles de alta calidad a un precio que pueden pagar. Sin la inversión pública, las familias y los niños que necesitan y sacan más provecho de estas



marketplace cannot offer families the high-quality early care and education they need at a price they can afford. Without public investment, the families and children who need and benefit most from these early experiences are the ones who get left behind.

We are far from the mountaintop. But when I consider what we have accomplished for young children in the 19 years since *From Neurons to Neighborhoods* was published, it takes my breath away. Standing now on the verge of another climb—another round of social change—I am holding my breath for the years ahead, ready to work in the hope that 19 years from now we will be celebrating the transformation of the early education profession.

Because if we are, it means that we will also have transformed the lives of tens of millions of children.

experiencias tempranas en la vida son los a quienes se dejan atrás.

Estamos lejos de la cima de la montaña. Pero cuando considero lo que hemos logrado a favor de los niños pequeños durante los 19 años desde que se publicó *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*, se me corta el aliento. A punto ya de otra subida—otra ronda de cambio social—aguanto la respiración al pensar en los años por venir, lista para trabajar con la esperanza de que en 19 años más estaremos celebrando la transformación de la profesión de educación infantil.

Porque si es así, significará que habremos transformado también las vidas de decenas de millones de niños.

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Flipping the Script

Educators Driving Public Policy

Marica Cox Mitchell and Lauren Hogan

In the theater, scripts create order. Everyone has a part to play, lines to memorize, and stage directions to follow. Productions, regardless of where they're staged, follow a similar pattern—right up until someone flips the script. Sometimes it's a small change: a surprising casting choice, a reframed set design. And sometimes it's a complete shift—*The Wizard of Oz* is reborn as *The Wiz,* then reimagined as *Wicked.*

In early childhood education, we may not think of our day-to-day actions as being guided by a script, but in many ways they are, with assigned roles and lines that have, for the most part, kept educators and policymakers apart. As it stands, each group stars in different acts of the play, and we rarely do scenes together. For our children's sake, however, it's time for us to flip the script. This article is a call to action, with recommendations for educators and policymakers about concrete steps that can make meaningful collaboration part of our day-to-day work.

Real victories

When educators and policymakers do work together, the results are impressive. From T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood (Child Care Services Association 2015) to the Worthy Wage campaign (Whitebook 2002), there have been national and state efforts, led by policymakers and educators in varying degrees, to enhance the image, effectiveness, and compensation of early childhood educators. Head Start, the Council for Professional Recognition, state-funded pre-K programs, and NAEYC Early Learning Program Accreditation increased the demand for educators with degrees and credentials. States developed workforce data systems and registries to better support and understand the profession. NAEYC launched its higher education accreditation and recognition systems to assess and support degree programs preparing early childhood educators. In some states, prekindergarten teachers working in early care and education centers receive pay comparable to their counterparts' pay in public elementary schools. As teachers continue to stand up for their profession, and engage in teacher-led walkouts in states from West Virginia to California, investments in teachers from the early grades on up may continue to increase.

The visibility and significance of the early childhood education profession was elevated with the release of the *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8* report (IOM & NRC 2015). Grounded in the science of child development, this report articulated the ways in which the various practitioners who contribute to the care and education of children from birth through age 8 are not acknowledged as a workforce unified by the common knowledge and competencies needed to do their jobs well. It offered recommendations on ways to improve the quality of professional practice and the practice environment for those professionals.

In 2017, building on the legacy and momentum of these efforts, NAEYC and 14 other national professional organizations launched the Power to the Profession (P2P) initiative, with two distinct and differentiating features. First, P2P was established explicitly to define the first-edition unified framework for the early childhood education profession, birth through age 8, across all settings, sectors, and states. The initiative was rooted in a theory of change with a broad base of research indicating that children benefit from a distinct, diverse, and defined early childhood education profession, with individuals who possess specialized knowledge, skills, and competencies, regardless of where they work, and who are compensated in accordance with the value of their highly skilled work.

> P2P was led and driven by current members of the early childhood education field.

Second, P2P was led and driven by the current members of the early childhood education field. From the decision drivers and decision makers who shaped the framework to the decision-making processes and the decisions included in the framework, the aim was to reflect the lived experiences and expertise of those who comprise the profession itself. Focus groups, surveys, conference calls and webinars, informal conversations, conference sessions, response letters, and focused meetings were continuously expanded to ensure that those impacted most by the P2P framework and those historically marginalized in policy development (such as educators of color working in home-based and center-based settings) were leveraged and elevated as experts. (To learn more about P2P, see www.powertotheprofession.org.)

Finding the right balance of inclusivity and exclusivity was a driver for both of these essential features, albeit in different ways. Addressing the first feature of P2P—establishing a unified framework for career pathways, knowledge, and competencies, qualifications, standards, and compensation—was challenging, in that it required fresh thinking to intentionally minimize the fragmentation of the field and its unintended consequences. Addressing the second feature, however—centering decisions around the expertise

of educators—was in many ways more difficult. The lessons learned from having educators drive policy serve as the impetus for this article.

It was clear from the beginning that the task force members and the affiliates, stakeholders, and other partners facilitating P2P conversations across the country had to confront the marginalization of educators in decision-making processes, particularly educators coming from culturally, racially, geographically, and linguistically diverse communities. While their marginalization is rooted in decades of racism and elitism that is both internal and external to the early childhood education landscape, it has resulted in a deep and significant gap between practice and public policy.

In most educators' careers, policies and recommendations of the magnitude of P2P's have happened *to* them and *without* them. As a result, those practicing as early childhood educators, including higher education faculty and others preparing educators, have become divorced from policy processes. Educators and education professors are overwhelmingly accustomed to not seeing themselves as experts or owners of their professional identities. In conversations with facilitators of the P2P nationwide engagement process, educators frequently voiced well-founded doubts about the influence their thoughts and recommendations would have on public policy and public financing. In seeking assurances that their lived experiences mattered, they shared the traumas in their lives wrought from working in an underfunded, top-down system created *for* them but *without* them.

The loudest and clearest message of P2P has been that educators' experiences must be heard and acknowledged. Within P2P and beyond, this needs to happen in ways that foster authentic and accessible engagement and that include references to other professions, such as nursing, so educators are able to see that their leadership can transform their profession.

The P2P discourse and the unifying framework it is producing both became much more robust, co-owned, and comprehensive because they were shaped by the expertise of the educators most directly impacted by the decisions being made. As of June 2019, groups in 46 states and territories had hosted P2P events, including information sessions, conference keynotes, focus groups, interviews, workshops, and webinars. Multiple rounds of iterative feedback (in English and Spanish) yielded comments and survey responses from nearly 6,000 individuals from all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and Washington, DC. Some 60 percent of the participants identified as current practitioners and 21 percent as educators of color. The process also included 145 focus groups reaching more than 3,000 individuals and 21 intensive focus groups prioritizing engagement with more than 440 educators from communities of color, educators who speak Spanish, and educators living in rural communities throughout the country. Many of the latter were part of collaborations and conversations organized and facilitated by partners such as the American Indian College Fund, the National Black Child Development Institute and affiliates, the Latino Policy Forum, and The Education Trust.

As a field that pays verbal homage to the research-policy-practice triad and the diversity-equity duo, this type of engagement between policymakers, influencers, and educators on pertinent issues related to educators' professional practice and accountability should be expected and routine. This article offers strategies and recommendations for early childhood educators (including faculty and professional development providers) and for policy specialists (including policymakers, analysts, and influencers) to flip the script—to play new roles, learn new lines, and help to narrow the gap between educators and the public policies that drive their practice.

The Early Childhood Educator Perspective

By Marica Cox Mitchell

I started my career in the early 1990s as a teacher assistant and then as a teacher. My role was to support the learning, development, and well-being of each child, giving careful consideration to family and community. The bulk of my preparation was driven by national and state professional competency standards related to curriculum development and implementation, responsive relationships, learning environments, assessments, pedagogy, and partnerships with families.

Throughout my teacher preparation courses and my later professional development opportunities, the vast majority of the lectures, group projects, reading assignments, and research reports focused solely on my classroom practices. Yet, I realized early in my teaching career that while the classroom environment I intentionally curated mattered, early childhood public policy and financing conditions also had a direct impact on my professional practice. Child care facility regulations had a greater influence on my professional development than my own understanding of my professional growth areas. Likewise, NAEYC accreditation criteria influenced my classroom design and materials more than my observations and formative assessments. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, I started to see the bigger picture: Head Start Performance Standards, the then-No Child Left Behind Act, school district teacher evaluation systems, teacher licensure policies, and quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) all had—and still have—policies and requirements that influence the identity, compensation, and practice of early childhood educators.

The Policy Perspective

By Lauren Hogan

From school boards to think tanks to the halls of Congress, thousands of people in this country are involved in designing and influencing policy related to young children, their families, and the people who care for and educate them. I personally came to this work compelled by my experience leading an after-school program for teenagers, convinced our country needed to both start earlier and think bigger. Since shifting my focus to early childhood, I have led literacy workshops for families and conducted home visits with parents of infants—but my professional degree is in public policy, not early childhood education.

While I've advocated for every early learning setting in my decade of work in policy departments at professional membership organizations, including NAEYC and the National Black Child Development Institute, I have never directly worked in one of those early learning settings. That is not uncommon. Most policy-oriented people work in professional associations, mayors' offices, Congress, think tanks, unions, state legislatures, lobbying firms, businesses, governors' offices, research institutions, city councils, and the White House. Very few of us are in schools, child care centers, or family child care homes—and there are not many former early childhood educators among policymakers, either.

Mind the gap

We early childhood educators are constantly reminded, and rightfully so, that the conditions we create in our classrooms can impact the development of the young children we support. Yet, we often do not fully understand the inner workings of the public policy contexts that also drive and sometimes dictate our practice. We consciously and subconsciously grant policymakers and government officials full autonomy to create public policy and regulatory systems, even though our code of ethics requires us to participate in developing policies and laws that are needed and to cooperate with families and other individuals and groups in these efforts.

A combination of factors contributes to this distance between public policy and practice. Some of these factors include

- Minimal professional preparation focused on early childhood public policy development
- Impenetrable barriers to accessing the places where policy decisions are made
- Limited time to focus on both classroom responsibilities and external policy contexts
- Inconsistent definitions of who early childhood educators are and what they do
- The frustration educators experience when we feel that policies and regulations are hindering rather than helping our ability to implement practices that best support children's learning and development
- The perception that public policy and advocacy are solely the responsibility of systems influencers and policy experts
- Educators' own reluctance to define themselves as experts who deserve to be decision makers

I experienced some of these factors during my journey from being an educator practicing in the classroom to one practicing in the public policy and systems-building arena. As a classroom teacher, I assumed others were responsible for driving policy. My role was simply to pay my membership dues so that professional and local advocacy organizations could do the policy lift. I was an implementer of policies and position statements; I saw myself as "just a teacher," with nothing to contribute in big-league policy conversations.

Mind the gap

In my experience, many in the policy arena will readily admit that policies would likely work better in practice if they were informed and shaped by people on the ground who best understand what it takes to achieve the shared goal of increasing access to high-quality early learning.

Yet the gap between educators and policy specialists continues to exist. It exists despite widespread recognition that traditional approaches—such as consulting with researchers, economists, and various other non-classroom experts—do not necessarily yield the best results.

This gap exists despite professed beliefs by policymakers who say they want to listen to the voices of educators, and despite flares of enthusiasm by educators who want their voices heard.

This gap exists because it is hard to bridge, built as it is on long-standing, deep-seated beliefs, assumptions, and biases, not to mention the influence of expectations and time limitations, as well as the interplay of ego and power. At its best, to be a policymaker is to believe that you can make something better than it is. But even with good intentions, this service orientation can transform into believing not only that you can *make* something better but also that you *know* better than the people whose lives are affected by the policies you create.

This division of duties between policy and practice worked for me because I was too exhausted to tackle both—time outside of my demanding work environment was for my family and my personal restoration. To me, it was the responsibility of school leaders (principals, superintendents, and center directors) to engage government agencies and their staff during meetings that were inevitably held during times I had to teach. My fellow teachers and I would discuss the strengths and gaps of early childhood public policies and regulatory systems, but we didn't have the time or space to share our views with policymakers. Even my college faculty who had conducted significant research in early childhood education appeared to be policy implementers, not co-creators.

My initial entry into the public policy and systems-building arena meant climbing a steep learning curve. I felt confident about what I knew, from both experience and formal education, and also vulnerable enough to identify what I did not know. Fully embracing my gaps, I completed graduate coursework in education leadership, sought out mentors, and accessed all of the learning opportunities I could.

The transition also required significant emotional energy. I had to self-affirm the specialized knowledge and the (otherwise often missing) practice-based lens I brought to public policy conversations. I also had to prepare myself for leading change in predominantly White, socially and economically privileged policy-making spaces. Engaging individuals and businesses that were thriving—and therefore uninterested in changing who had a place at the policy table and what was discussed—required me to self-regulate and persist. From these experiences, I became committed to narrowing the gap between public policy and practice and to reassuring practicing educators that they had the expertise and experience needed to influence policies that impact early childhood education. Public policy requires shared leadership and diverse expertise.

Based on what I've learned, here are some strategies I recommend to help early childhood educators, including faculty, prepare to flip the script and become more active in the public policy and advocacy arena.

How does this happen? As with so many difficult questions, to answer we all would have to look within ourselves. We would have to reflect on what we believe about early childhood educators that causes us to sideline their voices, to override their objections, and to design and promote policies that invest in systems and structures *around* the profession rather than *in* the profession itself.

Grappling with these issues cannot be done in a vacuum, and there is no such thing as finding a single, conclusive answer. It must be done in the context of learning, of seeking out and welcoming new voices, questions, experiences, ideas, and perspectives. Even as the professional apparatus strives to hold early childhood educators accountable for engaging in policy and advocacy work, and to support them in doing so, the fundamental shift must also come from policymakers and influencers, who need to embrace engagement and extend invitations to educators.

I have heard educators offer great, workable, implementable, and innovative ideas for solving policy problems. Based on my experiences, here are some strategies I recommend to help policy specialists flip the script to become more active and intentional in welcoming these ideas and the individual early childhood educators who offer them to the public policy and advocacy arena.

| EDUCATOR |

1. Know your professional practice

It is important for you to claim your space as an expert in your professional practice. To do so, you must have a command of the core knowledge base and the competencies that define the practice of early childhood educators. Educators as experts should be able to speak with authority, combining evidence and experience. For example, what factors impact the domains of child development? What are ethical assessment practices? How is effective curriculum developed and implemented? How is the pursuit of equity evident in your classroom? What do family-centered partnerships look like? These are complex questions, and responding to them requires specialized preparation.

Earning industry-recognized and accredited degrees and credentials signals that you have an understanding of the specialized research and rationales that drive early childhood educators' practice. Own the knowledge. And just as you claim your space with policymakers, so too do you need to claim your space with other members of the field. Value those who don't share your specialized competencies, professional responsibilities, and accountability, but don't cede the floor to them. All of our experiences matter, and we each have an obligation to speak on our own behalf.

| POLICY |

1. Seek to know the early childhood education profession and its professionals

Being an effective policymaker requires specific knowledge, skills, and competencies, just as being an early childhood educator does. But it's important for policymakers and influencers to know the scope of our expertise—and where it ends. Most of us have never been early childhood educators. Yet even for those who have been educators, the experience of being in a classroom, center, or home-based setting is likely to be a part of a distant past. In addition, because the best policymaking is anchored by, but not limited to, our own personal experiences, engaging with a diverse range of current early childhood educators who are working in varied settings is key.

Being an effective policymaker requires specific knowledge, skills, and competencies, just as being an early childhood educator does.

Each of us must prioritize the act of seeking out and accepting opportunities to show up, so we can experience firsthand what happens in early childhood education every day. We must make time each year to visit early education centers, schools, and family-based settings so that the time never comes when we realize we have not set foot in a particular early learning setting even as we develop policy that influences the educators and children in that setting. In addition to showing up in person, virtual tools and social media can and should be used to break down the barriers between policymakers and educators, so we can make good policies that are implementable in the way they are imagined.

2. Know that you belong at the policy-making table

Like young children, we too thrive when there is a sense of belonging. As educators, we sometimes feel like we do not belong in the policy-making arena. We relegate policy decisions to those whom we deem to be policy experts or leaders. In some cases, we do not feel welcome in the arena as intellectual or social equals, so we assume our expertise and experiences do not matter. However challenging and sometimes uncomfortable initial experiences in public policy may be, know that you have a professional and ethical obligation to be in those spaces. Know too that your journey into public policy and regulatory systems deepens your expertise as an educator. Finally, know how valued you are in this space: advocating for young children is our responsibility and a part of our profession. What's more, surveys have found that teachers' and faculty members' voices are trusted by likely voters—the very people we need to advance early education public policy and financing agendas (NAEYC 2015).

Advocating for young children is our responsibility and a part of our profession.

2. Don't make people bring a folding chair to the table

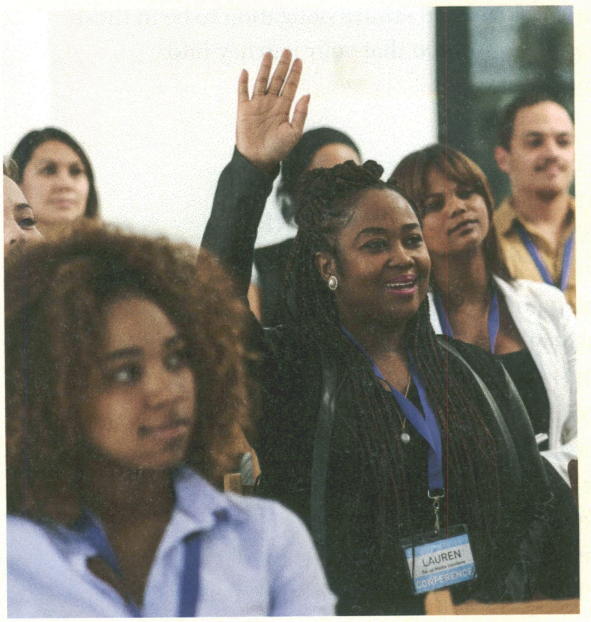
Shirley Chisholm, the first Black woman elected to the US House of Representatives, famously said, "If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair." I've always loved this quote and its never-say-no, us-against-the-world, get-up-and-at-'em activism. But a part of it has also always bothered me. Because folding chairs are, by nature, impermanent. They are brought out at the last minute to accommodate the unexpected, perhaps unnecessary guest. And the sentiment behind the quotation allows policymakers to do nothing to change our own tables or seats and to continue to operate under the assumption that if people want to participate, they will simply bring their own proverbial chairs. It is time to shift the responsibility for and the burden of making room. Educators have earned permanent seats at the table. (And *seats* is plural for a reason: let's agree to include more than one educator so no one person is tokenized.) This might mean building a bigger table. It might mean making the existing table more crowded. And it might mean asking some people currently at the table to give up their seats so new voices can be heard.

3. Understand the relevant government agencies and individuals

Many early childhood programs rely on a combination of government and private funding to be able to deliver high-quality services for young children and their families. Funding from the government (and from some private sources like philanthropic organizations) comes with accountability expectations or regulations. These requirements are typically developed and monitored by a network of local, state, and federal government agencies, and they inevitably impact educators' practice in intended and unintended ways. Connecting with individuals in these agencies can help you navigate the systems. Be informed about the various agencies, and build relationships with individuals in those agencies and with the policymakers leading their work.

Connecting with individuals in agencies can help you navigate the systems.

For example, do you know which government agency is responsible for child care regulations in your state? Which federal agency is responsible for the Head Start Performance Standards? Which state or local agency sets the standards for teacher licensure? Which state or local agency sets the standards for publicly funded prekindergarten? Does your state have a quality rating and improvement system? If so, who manages your state's QRIS? Your state likely has federal funding to support educators; which agencies decide how this funding is spent? Seeking the answers to these questions and connecting with individuals who can help you navigate these systems are crucial steps toward your successful engagement in the policy arena.



3. Make the systems understandable—and worth understanding

We policymakers ask educators to understand the systems, but it is incumbent upon us also to make the systems understandable. Chaos and complexity often serve as gatekeepers, marginalizing those who do not have the power, privilege, or time to easily access and navigate systems made obscure by a combination of history, accident, and design. These systems may include everything from licensing requirements that change when you cross a state border to unaligned, unstackable, English-language-only early childhood training programs that neither improve practice nor lead to career advancement but are required by a state nevertheless. With the implementation of Power to the Profession ahead, there will be opportunities for policymakers to lead and to participate in setting a distinct floor for early education quality that defines the professional preparation, responsibilities, competencies, scope of practice, specialization, compensation, and accountability for early childhood educators across states and settings. We policymakers and influencers should embrace those opportunities to create and finance early childhood systems that are clear, understandable, and navigable for early childhood educators and the families they serve.

4. Increase your network—you can't do it alone

As wide as the gap between practice and policy may seem, there are many advocates working to narrow it. Join a national organization and its local affiliate to begin building your network. Your leverage is only as strong as the national organizations that represent you. And those organizations grow stronger when their members are more active. Attend meetings and conferences hosted by professional organizations to meet others with similar or divergent perspectives. Organize informal meet-ups, like book clubs, potlucks, and picnics, to deepen relationships within your network. Use social media to stay connected.

Find authentic ways to make your network as diverse as the early childhood education profession itself. For example, do the educators in your network work in a variety of settings, including home-based programs, centers, and elementary schools? Does your network reflect the racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity of the profession? Do you have mentors who share their authentic selves with you? Do you have faculty and professional preparation specialists in your network? Do you have relationships with policy specialists at the local, state, and national levels? Do you know at least one staff member in each professional organization you belong to? The wider and more diverse your network, the more opportunities you'll have to advocate and influence policy in a way that makes sense to you.

And like all relationships, your relationships with members of your network thrive when they are reciprocal. Bring something to the table, starting with your willingness to share and to listen.

4. Go beyond the basic and the best

Policymakers and influencers are often presented with the cultivated voices of highly effective teachers—the educators working in the highest-quality settings and those who have heroically overcome challenges to achieve success. This is understandable, and those voices are critical. Yet, while listening to their stories, we can take advantage of access to these individuals by asking them more than basic questions, seeking to understand things like "What supports did you receive to help you achieve your success?," "If you have watched your colleagues struggle, what do you think would have made a difference for them?," and "How have local, state, and federal policies supported or hindered your success?" In addition, policymakers and influencers can seek out, request to talk with, and equally value the voices of those operating without awards, those who are openly struggling, and those who are just barely making it work every day.

Advocates routinely tell educators not to complain to policymakers (and that's good advice, particularly regarding problems that are not within the policymakers' jurisdiction to solve), but policymakers should still work to understand the challenges that educators are asking for help to solve. We should respect all educators' experiences and expertise and listen to their proposed solutions.

5. Make your expert voice heard

As an expert in early childhood education, there are many ways you can make your voice heard. Respond to calls for public comment, explain the importance of early childhood education at school board meetings, participate in policy meetings and town halls, share feedback on social media, join online community conversations, respond to surveys, host a radio show, invite policymakers to visit your program, ask candidates for public office to explain how they plan to support early childhood education, and/or write letters to policymakers. If these typical mechanisms do not work for you, advocate for and create the opportunities you want. Don't assume that others have the perspective and experience you can bring to a conversation, and don't automatically assume that others know more than you.

National professional organizations and their affiliates have many volunteer leadership opportunities for educators, including participation on boards, committees, councils, and peer reviewer panels. (To learn how to get more involved with NAEYC, visit NAEYC.org/get-involved.) In my opinion, every early childhood educator should be a member of a professional organization that can help bring our individual and collective voices to bear in the policy-making arena.

5. Make it possible to hear expert voices

As I mentioned earlier, many policy specialists say they value educators' input. But overall, our actions do not support that claim. To have educators at the table, we need to address their core logistical challenges, namely, time, money, and capacity. One potential solution that addresses each of these barriers at once revolves around the practical and critical issues of release time and substitute pools (filled with well-prepared educators). These are sorely needed in early childhood education. They would make it possible for currently practicing educators to contribute to public policy initiatives during the work day and also to advance their own education by taking classes and doing required coursework without compromising children's health and safety or the quality of children's learning experiences.

As we create and fund these needed solutions, we need to establish allowable uses for release time that not only let educators attend classes offered, for example, at 4:00 p.m., by the local college, but also let them provide testimony to a legislature that convenes its hearings at 10:00 a.m. or participate in an early childhood advisory council meeting that happens at 1:00 p.m. every fourth Tuesday of the month.

At the same time, we can elevate and integrate the voices of early childhood educators by requiring that existing advisory councils add members who are practicing educators, creating new educators-only advisory councils, and then holding the council meetings at a time and place when and where those educators can attend, while providing stipends and transportation support.

In addition, from bonuses built into QRIS systems to requirements built into wage supplement programs to the creation of competitive awards, we should incentivize and applaud school districts, state preschool systems, Head Start programs, family child care networks, and other groups that routinely encourage and support their early childhood educators to engage in policy development.

Finally, we should consider how our hearings and briefings support remote and video participation; maybe an educator can't leave her classroom, but she could share her perspective while the children in her classroom are napping. Maybe she could record and share a video that can be played in the briefing room. There are many ways to invite and expand engagement; continuing to ask educators how they would like to show up would surely yield more needed and creative solutions.

Conclusion

We can take it upon ourselves, educators and policy specialists, to change things together. Power dynamics and relationships shift all the time, closing some doors and opening others. It's never too late to flip the script, especially knowing that children and families will be all the better when we do.

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Young Children Cluster Topics, 2021

2021 Issue	Cluster Topic	Articles Due
March	Supporting Infants' and Toddlers' Social and Emotional Development: Rethinking Behavior, Understanding Mental Health, and Identifying Specialists' Roles	April 1, 2020
May	The Power of Picture Books	June 1, 2020
July	Intentional Teaching and Assessments for Building Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension	August 1, 2020
September	How the Arts Contribute to Child Development Socially, Emotionally, and Academically	October 1, 2020
November	Teaching and Leading for Equity: Maximizing the Learning of Children Impacted by Systems of Bias	December 1, 2020

Organizing Early Education for Improvement

Voices from the Field on Essential Supports

Debra M. Pacchiano, Maureen R. Wagner, and Holly Lewandowski

Young children are gaining access to and enrolling in preschool programs across the country in increasing numbers. Unfortunately, the quality of these programs varies tremendously. The highest quality programs disproportionately serve children from the most advantaged homes. By contrast, lower quality and less effective programs disproportionately serve children from under-resourced communities—the very children who stand to benefit most from top-notch early childhood education (Valentino 2017). Although leaders, teachers, staff, and families in all programs want to see children learn, grow, and thrive, research confirms that, on average, instructional quality remains mediocre. Studies in which researchers observe and assess interactions between

teachers and children in publicly funded preschool classrooms show that, on average, instructional quality is well below the level associated with academic or social gains for children (Aikens et al. 2013).

A growing body of research demonstrates that strengthening the organizational climate and conditions surrounding classroom practice and family engagement offers an effective method for increasing quality. We spent time observing early childhood education programs, some that were high functioning and some that were not. We talked with leaders, teachers, staff, and families about what supported them in, or hindered them from, implementing higher quality teaching and positively impacting children's learning. Differences in their organizational climates and conditions were unmistakable. Simply put, high-performing sites had organizational contexts far more supportive of teaching, learning, and family engagement than sites that were not high performing. In this article, we describe those strong organizational contexts and how they empower leaders, teachers, and families to aspire to and realize higher quality practice and better outcomes for young children.

Strengthen organizational conditions to lift quality

Robust research evidence from K–12 education highlights the importance of organizational climate and conditions for improving school performance (Allensworth, Ponisciak, & Mazzeo 2009; Kraft, Marinell, & Shen-Wei Yee 2016). Researchers at the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research (UChicago Consortium) identified five organizational features of schools that interact with life inside classrooms and are essential to growth in student achievement: effective leadership, collaborative teachers, involved families, supportive environment, and ambitious instruction (Bryk et al. 2010). (See "The Five Essentials Framework," right.)

These researchers found that high-quality teaching and sustained student engagement in the classroom depend in large measure on whether leadership and staff engage in a culture of ongoing support and development. Surveys of teachers and students measuring these five essential supports strongly predicted which schools were most and least likely to show improvements in student engagement and achievement over time. Elementary schools that were strong in at least three of these essential supports were 10 times more likely to substantially improve student achievement in reading and math than schools that were weak in most of these essentials. Importantly, a sustained weakness in a single essential support reduced the likelihood of the school improving student learning to less than 10 percent (Bryk et al. 2010).

Early childhood education programs are complex organizations that are similar in many ways to elementary schools; what occurs in early childhood classrooms (in school or community settings) is influenced by the policies, practices, and relationships that prevail across the entire organization. Research focused on organizational aspects of early education programs suggests that programs with supportive climates and cultures are more likely to exhibit higher quality environments (Dennis & O'Connor 2013) and instruction that ultimately enhance children's learning (Burchinal et al. 2010; Ehrlich et al. 2018). Without a simultaneous focus on strengthening classroom practices and the organizational contexts that enable effective instruction, it is unlikely that schools or centers will realize meaningful, sustained improvements in the quality of young children's education.

The Five Essentials Framework

© UChicago Impact

The essentials of early education

Four years ago, researchers at the Ounce of Prevention Fund and the UChicago Consortium combined their knowledge of early childhood education program implementation and school improvement, seeking to better understand the relevance of essential organizational supports to the performance of early childhood education settings. This work culminated in the Early Education Essentials framework. We identified six organizational conditions that are essential for creating and sustaining a high-quality early learning program, and we developed a set of teacher and parent surveys that measure these essential organizational supports in school- and community-based early education settings.

From 2014 through 2016, our team engaged in a rigorous and iterative development and testing process to adapt the existing UChicago Consortium's 5Essentials teacher surveys for applicability in early childhood education; we also created a new parent survey. In 2017, we conducted a validation study designed to determine whether the new surveys capture credible and useful information about the organizational conditions of early education programs. (Readers interested in learning more about our work are encouraged to visit www.theounce.org/early-education-essentials/ and to review our prior publications; see, for example, Pacchiano et al. 2018 and Ehrlich et al. 2018). Quantitative findings were very positive, confirming that the surveys are reliable across settings and that responses are valid because survey scores relate to both teacher–child interaction quality (as measured by the Classroom Assessment Scoring System [CLASS], Pre-K) and attendance outcomes. In addition, we found that in early childhood education, parents and families offer a unique perspective that is best captured by a distinct essential: Parent Voice. Our validation study helped confirm our original hypothesis about the relevance of organizational conditions to the performance of early education sites. The six essential conditions of early education that follow are the culmination of this series of studies.

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1. **Effective Instructional Leaders:** *Sites poised for improvement have school or program leadership strategically focused on children's development and early achievement. These leaders nurture trust, collective understanding, and responsibility for excellence and improvement among staff and families.* A growing body of data in the early childhood field links the beliefs and practices of program leaders to classroom-level constructs of structural and interactional quality (McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership 2010). For example, a recent study found that classrooms achieving the highest scores on a measure of teacher–child interaction quality also had leaders reporting high expectations for their staff and allocating resources to build staff professional capacity (Rohacek et al. 2010).

2. **Collaborative Teachers:** *In sites with collaborative teachers, staff are committed to the school or program, build strong and trusting relationships with their colleagues, and work together continuously to improve teaching and learning.* Research in early childhood settings indicates that teacher collaboration improves teacher effectiveness and yields meaningful improvements in children's achievement (Rohacek et al. 2010). The degree of workplace support for professional learning and collaboration with peers has been found to be central to continuous improvements in classroom practice (Whitebook & Ryan 2011). Two preschool-focused randomized control trials compared traditional workshop training to weekly in-class mentoring from exemplary peers and weekly peer collaboration to unpack curriculum. In both trials, teachers in the collaboration conditions reported greater satisfaction with their professional learning and higher rates of trust and appreciation for peers; end-of-year observations indicated that collaborative teachers provided greater emotional support to children and talked with children more frequently and in more cognitively complex ways (Domitrovich et al. 2009).

3. **Supportive Environment:** *Sites with supportive environments are physically and emotionally safe and engaging. All staff hold high expectations for children's social, emotional, and academic learning, coupled with nurturing and positive emotional supports for children and families.* A robust body

of literature establishes the link between preschool and elementary teachers' emotionally supportive interactions with children—interactions that are frequent, warm, and responsive to children's needs—and children's improved social and academic outcomes (for example, Phillips, Gormley, & Lowenstein 2009). Recently, researchers have begun exploring whether the social and emotional climate of a school or center contributes to classroom quality in preschool. Significant associations have been found between overall organizational climate and classroom structural quality, such that classrooms in centers rated as having more positive relational organizational climates (e.g., high ratings of teachers' relationships with their colleagues and leadership) were rated higher in regard to classroom structural quality (e.g., high ECERS-R scores) (Dennis & O'Connor 2013).

4. **Ambitious Instruction:** *In sites with ambitious instruction, teachers and staff provide consistently engaging, effective, rigorous, and developmentally appropriate curriculum and instruction.* Extensive research has linked developmentally appropriate and instructionally meaningful teacher–child interactions—those that prompt children's thinking and develop their concept knowledge and vocabulary—to gains in children's learning outcomes (e.g., Howes et al. 2008; Mashburn et al. 2008). Findings from a national study indicate that preschool children who spend more time engaged with teachers who implement developmentally appropriate practices demonstrated larger gains at the end of the year on measures of oral language, literacy, and math (Chien et al. 2010). Underscored

in the early childhood education research is the importance of teachers' goal orientation and their intentionality in using developmentally appropriate instruction to develop children's early literacy, early math, and expressive language—especially for children from low-income households (Burchinal et al. 2010). A major longitudinal study of effective classroom practices of 12 sites with positive child outcomes found that the pedagogy at those sites was characterized by teaching that involved "sustained shared thinking" between teachers and children working one-on-one and in small-group activities (Sylva et al. 2004, 2010). Also, leaders and staff viewed educational and social development as complementary and of equal importance in the preschool years.

5. **Involved Families:** *In sites with involved families, staff develop mutually respectful and collaborative relationships with families and support active family engagement in children's learning.* Family education is an integral component of virtually all early childhood programs. Early education research and practice has long focused on the critical roles of families in supporting children's learning outcomes. Numerous studies suggest that the meaningful engagement of families in their children's early learning supports both kindergarten readiness and long-term academic success (Henrich & Gadaire 2008). Children with involved families exhibit higher levels of social skills and motivation and greater academic gains in both reading and math (McWayne et al. 2004). Further, families receiving support services demonstrate improvements in their parenting knowledge and attitudes and reductions in material hardships (Layzer et al. 2001). By connecting with families early on as partners in the educational process, early childhood education programs establish strong home–school connections that support children's engagement and achievement (Hindman et al. 2012).
6. **Parent Voice:** *Parents and guardians feel included as partners in their children's learning and development, including influence over the programming.* Parents and guardians in sites with strong organizational conditions receive specific feedback on children's learning and development and, in turn, provide their own knowledge and input to guide teachers' decisions. All families, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or income level, feel valued and respected by the program. Leaders and staff treat children's family members as knowledgeable partners and create leadership opportunities for parents and guardians in the school or center community. Leaders, teachers, and staff ensure that families fully understand the value of early childhood education and are equipped to support their children's learning.

Dynamics of the Early Education Essentials framework

The six early education essential conditions are best understood together, as interdependent subsystems undergirding the daily work of teaching and learning in early childhood education programs. Each essential contributes to student outcomes and to the other essentials. That is, when one of the essential supports is strengthened, it supports the development of the others. Only when all of these essentials are collectively strong can sites create contexts that are fully supportive of teaching, learning, and family engagement, enabling and encouraging the work staff engage in daily with each other and with children and families.

Although all of the essentials are mutually reinforcing, two essentials—leadership and teacher collaboration—play unique roles and can be seen as entry points for strengthening the other organizational supports

(Pacchiano, Klein, & Shigeyo Hawley 2016). Leadership is the driver of change, while teacher collaboration is the vehicle that leaders use to drive improvement. Leaders are responsible for creating a climate and conditions supportive of teaching and continuous improvement. This includes establishing a purpose-driven vision for excellence, building relational trust, galvanizing staff activity in the service of improvement, and providing teachers with coherent instructional guidance and time during the workday to collaborate with colleagues to work toward ambitious instruction and improved practice (Hargreaves & Fullan 2012). During this protected time, teachers work together to develop and continuously improve curriculum and instruction, emotionally supportive learning environments, and family engagement. Together, these two levers—leadership and teacher collaboration—build a foundation for early education programs to create and sustain strength in the other essential organization conditions.

Illustrations of the essentials in action

To illustrate the interplay between the essentials, we provide further description along with illustrative quotes from field research. Readers interested in more information are encouraged to read the full report detailing the findings of this research (Pacchiano et al. 2018). In sites where the essentials are strong, leaders develop a program vision grounded in early childhood developmental science, then continually employ their vision by clarifying strategy and influencing staff members' actions toward the shared vision. Leaders use formal and informal opportunities and conversations to reaffirm priorities, inform and encourage staff, and reinforce commitment to action. These leaders cultivate a collaborative culture by modeling and celebrating reflection, inquiry, discussion, and learning in order to support staff to improve practice. Leaders reframe challenges as problems of practice so they can guide the work and stimulate new thinking about common issues. A teacher we interviewed at a strongly organized early childhood education program illustrates the positive impacts of a growth-minded leader and a collaborative culture on teachers' work:

> I feel like it's empowering [here]—it's not just from the top down. It's right here, and we believe in this stuff and I have something to share and it's valued by our administrator. Then your coteachers and your colleagues also buy in too, and you have that energy and you have that love. Then you have an administrator that pushes you in that way and supports you and guides you and nudges you a bit farther. I think it's kind of what we try to do with our students too, now, even when they're only 3. I think [the principal/director] leads by example, for sure.

Leaders champion and depend on teacher collaboration to build internal professional capacity. Leaders have confidence that, with ongoing professional learning, staff will innovate practice to better meet the needs of all children. Leaders expect staff to take on leadership roles that support practice improvement.

In centers and schools where the six essentials are well imple mented, leaders ensure that teachers have routine, protected time to meet together to discuss children's learning, to raise problems of practice, to receive encouragement, to share ideas, and to coplan instructional improvements. One teacher shared an example of how she and her teaching team routinely used this time to improve their ability to meet the needs of diverse learners:

> We have a team meeting weekly. . . . I'll talk about two kids, and then I'll have each teacher talk about one. Then we put in our individualized plan, and we talk about goals in different areas. So, whether it's social-emotional that we need to be working on, or cognitive, language, literacy—whatever it is—we bring that up with the whole team so everybody shares what they've seen and the steps that we need to take with that child, moving forward.

Teacher collaboration is structured, data-informed, and focused on immediate problems of practice related to improving children's learning. When this essential is strong, collaboration opportunities have a clear purpose and process and are designed to deepen knowledge and improve teaching and learning. Leaders work alongside teachers using protocols to focus discussions, examine data, and build shared commitments to best practices. A teacher in a strongly organized school told us,

> We do a lot of observations in each other's classrooms, which is helpful. Two or maybe three times this year so far we used a protocol where we went into each other's rooms and wrote down . . . four things you saw that you wanted to highlight, three things you wanted to take back, and then two things that you had questions about. [Then] we went back, sat down, and talked about it. That was really interesting.

In contrast, programs in which only one or two essential supports are strong find that the benefits of those strengths are limited by the lack of organization in other areas. For example, teachers may establish systems of collaboration but may struggle to protect that time without leader support and lack focus without aligned curriculum, meaningful assessment data, and family input on children's needs. Only by considering these organizational essential supports together can programs build and maintain comprehensive organizational strength.

Structuring leader-facilitated, teacher-led improvement

In addition to a reliable and valid tool to measure the strength of the essentials in their programs, early childhood education practitioners need resources that enable effective use of the data to make changes and improve over time. Research suggests that practitioners' motivation and success using evidence to inform decision making is enhanced when data are displayed visually and when data review, interpretation, and use are structured by protocols that leaders and staff use together (Leithwood et al. 2010). The essentials teach us that it matters greatly how leaders interact with their staff as they drive change. Leaders who enable fundamental change interact with teachers in facilitative and inclusive ways that intentionally structure teacher influence and encourage staff to persist in improvement efforts. They also serve as instructional leaders by intentionally supporting teachers and staff in their daily work. Teachers and staff need professional learning time and support from leaders to critically reflect about practice in order to improve that practice as well as children's learning.

Using the Early Education Essentials framework and survey data as their conceptual and decision-making model, leaders can navigate accountability demands more constructively and generate improvement more effectively. The data dialogue and root cause analysis process leads to increased exploration and analysis of strengths and weaknesses. Leaders and staff can problem solve collaboratively to identify small changes toward improvement. This process builds trust, which is the foundation for change between leaders, teachers, and staff. It also drives momentum for change by allowing everyone to realize small wins on the path to greater improvement.

Recent work has focused on creating resources that help practitioners use the Early Education Essentials survey data to empower improvement. In particular, these resources help practitioners learn how to conduct root cause analysis of their organizational strengths and weaknesses and to engage in Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles. Together, these processes deepen their confidence in using data collaboratively and in making incremental steps toward positive change. One teacher expressed how much the root cause analysis honors diverse perspectives and experiences, stating,

> I've done some data-driven meetings before in regards to parent concern, but I don't think I've ever had the opportunity before to analyze the root cause, . . . [asking] "Why did you think the parent felt this way?" . . . Having the opportunity to sit down as a team and analyze what the root could possibly be and . . . [coming] from different perspectives, different walks of life, different social backgrounds, different economic backgrounds, different races—I think that was something very valuable about this tool that I just haven't experienced before.

After engaging with just one cycle of this process over the course of one year, teachers and staff expressed a sense of empowerment and excitement to work together toward further change. One teacher reflected on her new appreciation of the power of focusing on small changes, saying,

> Having that structure helped us to be able to say, "This seems like a gigantic problem, but really . . . [we] can just take little pieces of it and . . . work together as a team to make some changes." That might not seem like big, earth-shaking changes in parent connection, but we're already starting to see some improvement.

Leaders also expressed enthusiasm for how the process supported continuous improvement efforts while building stronger relationships and trust among leaders and staff. One leader remarked, "This kind of made us want to blossom . . . we saw that this is what happens with this minimum effort and to think what we could do if we expanded this . . . if we did this all year long!"

Conclusion

A growing body of research demonstrates the power and importance of organizational conditions to increase the quality of early childhood education settings. These organizational conditions matter greatly to the actions of leaders and staff because they affect daily actions and attitudes toward the school or center. For families, leaders and staff in sites with strong essential conditions pave the way for meaningful program–family partnerships, whereas sites with weak essentials relegate families to the periphery. Simply put, strong implementation of the essentials enables and encourages the work that staff engage in daily with each other and with children and families. Moreover, early childhood education programs are best empowered to make improvements to their organizational conditions when equipped with clear and actionable data, data reports designed to promote and enable inquiry, structured protocols to facilitate collaborative decision making, and ongoing rapid cycles of improvement focused on small changes.

Amid the patchwork of funding streams and regulatory systems, the key to driving performance is how leaders bring coherency to the focus and direction of the program and buffer staff from fragmented thinking and task-based approaches. A program leader's developmentally based vision and facilitative approach define the levels of motivation, action, persistence, and happiness of all adults in the site. Strong leaders build the capacity of their staff to meet the diverse learning needs of their young students by protecting time for staff collaboration. Routine discussions of practice ignite collective understanding, responsibility, and, most critically, persistent action to improve teaching and learning.

To fully and effectively engage in this work, leaders need time and resources to investigate their programs' organizational conditions, to bring together teachers and staff for collaborative inquiry and decision making, and to follow through on making and studying the small changes identified. The Early Education Essentials framework calls into question the effectiveness of compliance-oriented, top-down organizational structures in early education institutions. Policy makers seeking to raise the performance of early childhood education schools and centers should consider how these essential organizational support structures and practices supplant other program standards that have not been linked to greater staff commitment, higher-quality implementation, and better child outcomes. In addition, it would be wise to conceptualize professional development investments into those designed to empower site-based instructional leadership and routine job-embedded teacher collaboration, specifically. The field stands to benefit greatly from a broadened definition of quality that includes organizational conditions and the important role of leaders and instructional guides.

Raising organizational quality demands the concerted and coordinated efforts of early childhood education program leaders, teachers, staff, and families, along with systems-level support from organizations, school districts, and policy makers. Through this work, the early education field has an opportunity to create programs that are better structured to empower and support leaders, teachers, and families in the critically important work of educating young children.

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Creating a Work Environment That Supports Staff Retention

Nicole R. Hylton and Jennifer A. Vu

Pam Harper is the administrator of an inclusive early education and care center that offers both traditional early education and care services and Prescribed Pediatric Extended Care services for children with medical needs who require skilled nursing care. Pam opened the program in 2000, and it has since been thriving. Pam employs 10 early childhood staff: 80 percent of the staff have been employed at the center for over three years, including three staff members who have been at the center for more than 10 years.

Pam's record of staff retention is quite uncommon for early care and education programs. High turnover has plagued the profession since its beginnings. In 2012, the mean annual staff departure rate for early education and care centers was 13 percent, a decrease from 25 percent in 1990 (Whitebook, Phillips, & Howes 2014). (New

data are now being collected; to learn about the 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education, visit www.norc.org/Research/Projects/Pages/national-survey-of-early-care-and-education.aspx.) While staff retention is improving, the need to address it is still urgent. The consequences in the wake of high turnover are staggering, with the loss of staff affecting children, families, and the general morale and stress levels of staff remaining in the program (Marotz & Lawson 2007).

There are a number of factors that may contribute to staff turnover. While minimal pay and lack of benefits are often cited as causes (Whitebook, Phillips, & Howes 2014), there are other contributing factors (Cassidy et al. 2011). Elements of the work environment—such as administrative support, satisfaction with coworkers, and the perceived value of staff members' work—are factors in why staff choose to leave or stay (Russell, Williams, & Gleason-Gomez 2010; Cassidy et al. 2011). Creating the type of work environment that addresses these factors may seem daunting, but leaders like Pam have found low-cost ways to increase staff retention.

Unlocking her secrets to successful staff retention was our goal when we sat down to talk with Pam. We anticipated coming away with a list of "must do" practices, which we did; but we also came away with a much deeper understanding of what it takes to operate a program in which staff want to stay.

As we talked with Pam, a consistent theme emerged: the staff are valued and respected, and the work each person does is appreciated. This may seem simplistic, but truly being able to embed this notion in program culture requires intentionality and effort. This article summarizes Pam's key strategies and practices; we have organized her powerful messages according to the elements of the work environment noted earlier, namely administrative support, satisfaction with coworkers, and perceived value of staff work.

Administrative support

Administrative support may be the single most critical influence in the success of staff retention, given its encompassing nature. Administrative support manifests itself in many ways, and defining it as a concept opens it to individual interpretation (Russell, Williams, & Gleason-Gomez 2010). One essential component is facilitating a sense of community among caregivers, which reduces feelings of anxiety and hostility, thereby aiding in staff retention (Hale-Jinks, Knopf, & Kemple 2006). For Pam, building community starts with communication and flexibility. Communication is key in expressing support, and it cannot be overemphasized. Pam believes it should be fluid, abundant, and purposeful. When information is shared with staff, it conveys that staff are important. Different ways of sharing information should be in place, ensuring not only communication *to* staff, but *from* and *among* staff as well.

Pam also prioritizes flexibility because she understands that staff members have lives outside of work. As the administrator, Pam plays a role in helping staff with their work–family balance. She is as flexible as possible with staff schedules, particularly lunchtimes and days off, to allow for personal needs, attending children's activities, and taking higher education courses. Flexibility is important inside the classroom too. Lesson planning, activities, room arrangement, and overall classroom management are all areas that benefit from the creativity and freedom that flexibility provides.

While there are many ways in which administrative support can be conveyed, what matters most is that staff feel supported. A teacher in Pam's center wrote, "I've been in the center for almost three years. I love being here because my boss is great. She is a good, hardworking person. She appreciates my work and always shows that. I learned a lot from her. I've been in several centers, but she is the only boss that really understands how hard it is working in this field." Evoking this type of response should be every administrator's goal, and with intentional planning and conscious effort, it can be attained.

Satisfaction with coworkers

Years ago, a center director shared with us, "People don't leave jobs; people leave people." While this is a broad statement, research does support the concept that a person's relationships with coworkers are a factor in deciding whether to seek another job (Cassidy et al. 2011). An administrator can't make staff like each other, but there are strategies that can be put into place to cultivate good relationships and a strong team. Building on individual strengths can be a productive first step in the process.

A team's power is in its diversity of strengths, personalities, experiences, and knowledge.

Starting a conversation about team building by talking about individual strengths may seem like a contradiction, but a team starts with individuals. While identifying a person's strengths takes time and watchful patience, once strengths have been determined, opportunities can be created for that staff member to showcase those strengths and be successful. For example, Pam asks teachers who are detail-oriented to be in charge of fundraisers, and she asks teachers who are approachable and skilled at explaining things to help orient new staff.

A team's power is in its diversity of strengths, personalities, experiences, and knowledge. The challenge is helping staff understand and value that diversity. Setting the expectation that everyone needs to work together is another essential step to take early in the team-building process. Pam tells her staff, "You don't have to like each other, you don't have to be best friends, you don't have to socialize outside of here, but you have to respect each other and work together when you are at work."

Pam's commitment to facilitating coworker relationships is reflected in the way she handles staff conflict. Pam understands that even the smallest issues can fester into larger disputes, so she sits down with staff to talk through issues when they arise, getting into the tiniest details to help staff come to an agreement of what works for each person.

For example, at her center, a change in staff schedules resulted in problems with the laundry schedule, which led to contention between two staff members about who could use the washing machine and when. Pam sat down with the two, listened, and talked them through how the issue came about and possible solutions to it.

The two individuals were tasked with creating a new laundry schedule that would allow everyone access when they needed it.

A work environment in which staff feel valued, respected, and appreciated is key.

Confidentiality is also important: Pam has a written center policy that prohibits staff from talking inappropriately about children, families, and each other, which includes posts on staff members' personal social media accounts. This halts gossip and makes clear that it is unacceptable.

Pam also creates opportunities for staff to get to know each other in a more personal way, allowing staff to appreciate each other as individuals with lives and interests outside of work. Hosting events like picnics for staff and their families fosters relationships both at work and outside of it. Pam's staff frequently gathers socially outside of work, and the gatherings often include staff who have previously worked at the program—a demonstration of lasting friendships.

Perceived value of staff work

A common misconception in the US about early childhood educators is that they are just watching children while families are at work. Of course, those of us in the profession (and many outside of it too) know that the role of early care and education providers is much bigger, harder, and more important than that unfortunate stereotype conveys. Early educators are setting the stage—intellectually, socially, and emotionally—for the rest of children's lives. That is easy to forget amidst the daily activities and chores of a classroom, so reminding staff of the big picture and of their vital contributions is crucial.

In addition to directly conveying her own appreciation to her staff, Pam helps them feel connected to the community and to the larger early childhood profession by being involved in numerous organizations, initiatives, and committees and passing information on to her staff. Pam frequently uses email to share relevant articles, newsletters, and announcements with her staff. She takes the time to send these resources "to make them understand it's a bigger world than just their eight hours a day here." Helping staff see

Expressions of Appreciation for Staff

Personal thank-you	• Verbal recognition before peers at staff meeting • Handwritten note or card • Bulletin board where administrators and staff can display thank-you messages and recognize each other
Food treat	• Coffee and bagels for breakfast • Lunch on a stressful day • Dinner provided during an evening staff meeting
Small token	• Useful or fun gift with catchy message (such as a note stating, "You deserve a break!," tied to a candy bar) • Gift certificate in a small amount (such as a five-dollar gift card for a coffee shop) • Act of service (such as offering to vacuum or wash a staff member's car or take on an undesirable task for a week)
Commemoration of an achievement (educational accomplishment, years of service, job promotion)	• Flowers • NAEYC professional membership • Paid registration for a professional conference • Paid time off

the value of their work as it is situated in the broader field of education is crucial in fostering a sense of professionalism and purpose.

It is also important for staff to feel that the program administrators value teachers' work. Teachers who feel valued and respected are more likely to stay in their jobs, while those who feel unappreciated are more likely to leave (Marotz & Lawson 2007). Demonstrating appreciation can be achieved with minimal or no cost, as long as it is genuine. Acts of appreciation can occur weekly, periodically, or on special occasions. Some suggestions, based on our conversation with Pam and on our own experiences, are provided in the table, "Expressions of Appreciation for Staff," on the previous page.

When we commented on the many things she does for her staff, Pam replied, "For me, hiring is such a pain. . . . It's traumatic for the kids, it's traumatic for the parents, and it's a lot of work to hire somebody, train somebody, and hope that it all works out. . . . It's so much more beneficial to keep and build the staff you have. Doing those little things helps to do that."

Conclusion

Staff turnover is an ongoing challenge in the early childhood education profession. A work environment in which staff feel valued, respected, and appreciated is key, and it is something administrators have the power to create.

An administrator who is able to integrate challenge, opportunity, and recognition into everyday work activities is more likely to hold on to employees who are committed to their jobs (Marotz & Lawson 2007). One teacher from Pam's program expressed what all administrators would like to hear more frequently: "I really enjoy working here. I've been here since 2005. I plan on staying here until I retire."

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Building a Gender-Balanced Workforce

Supporting Male Teachers

Kirsten Cole, Jean-Yves Plaisir, Mindi Reich-Shapiro, and Antonio Freitas

When Javier, a kindergarten teacher, leads morning meeting, he begins with a mindfulness exercise to prepare the 27 energetic and curious children in his classroom to be present with each other. Throughout the day, Javier's gentle demeanor balances and supports the exuberance of the children in his care.

Javier knows he is fortunate—many male early childhood educators are the only ones working at their sites, but Javier is one of several on the staff at his small public elementary school. When asked to reflect on what his role as a male teacher means for his students,

Javier offers, "I'm showing them that not every man is scary or somebody that isn't dependable. That a man is someone who can say 'Good job! I notice how you did this.' Men can give you advice or can be encouraging or nurturing and give you, like, a hug. You know, a side hug."

According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019), fewer than 3 percent of preschool and kindergarten teachers are men—and this figure has not changed substantially in recent decades (US Bureau of Labor Statistics 1995). Male early childhood teachers like Javier find themselves and their work received in a variety of ways. Some colleagues and families offer affirmation and support, while others treat male early childhood educators with curiosity or suspicion. Wanting to understand the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that impact men's decisions to teach in early childhood, we spent two years studying the experiences of male early childhood educators in New York City.

We embarked on this research to learn more about the circumstances that impact recruitment and retention, including how professional development and mentoring experiences can support the growth of these educators' practice. To become excellent early childhood educators, male teachers require the same preparation and ongoing professional development as female teachers. However, because of their current scarcity in the field, male educators may also require intentional supports that address the particular circumstances they face related to bias and isolation. This article documents some of the joys and challenges that male early childhood teachers experience, and offers concrete recommendations for policy and practice that can be implemented to increase gender balance in the field.

As young children grow, they need to know that people of all genders have an important role to play in their care and education. Early childhood education plays a critical part in young children's gender identity development (Solomon 2016). When young children do not have relationships with male teachers and caregivers, traditional gender stereotypes are reinforced, particularly as they relate to children's understanding of who is responsible for their growth and learning (Aina & Petronella 2011; Brownhill & Oates 2016).

Children experience a range of models of femininity and womanhood though their exposure to a variety of female educators and caregivers. When young children do not experience a comparable range of models of masculinity, their view of what it means to be a boy or a man may be monolithic or incomplete (Giese 2018). As they grow, all children need to see and be part of relationships in which male children and adults are allowed to be emotionally expressive and deeply connected; this is especially true for children who identify as male, since our culture often discourages them from such expression (Way 2013). Improving the gender balance of the early childhood workforce would provide all children with a richer variety of role models at this critical time in their gender identity development (Drudy 2008).

A Note on Gender

Throughout this article, we refer to male and female educators and children as well as to notions of masculinity. We recognize that the labels of "male" and "female" suggest that gender is binary and do not encompass the range of gender identities that exist; we also acknowledge the complexities and contradictions such binaries reinforce.

When arguing for the need to increase the numbers of men working in early childhood education, we do not mean to promote an essentialized view of gender, as if only male educators can provide young children with models of masculinity. Our argument for the need for more male educators in the profession is grounded in a desire to offer young children a more multifaceted experience of gender throughout their care and education. The harms caused by a culture of toxic masculinity are increasingly visible (Clemens 2018; Giese 2018), and the effort to create a more gender-balanced workforce seems more important all the time. As we build the profession, we seek to offer all young children a healthy and supported environment in which to grow, learn, and become themselves.

A place-based study of male educators

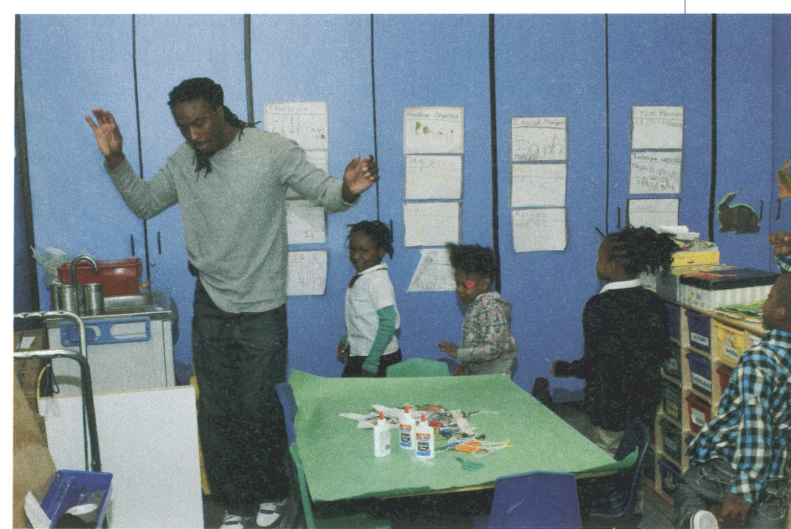
The goal of our two-year study was to understand the conditions that support or constrain male early childhood educators. To create a detailed picture of their experiences, we collected data in various forms, including from a questionnaire, interviews, and focus groups. (All of the narratives in this article come from these sources.) Although our study was limited to New York City, we sought participants who worked at a variety of site types—NYC Department of Education schools, community-based organizations, and a few tuition-based programs—and who educated children in a range of neighborhoods with low, medium, and high levels of economic supports and resources. Our participants held a variety of positions—assistant teachers, paraprofessionals, coteachers, lead teachers—and they had a range of levels of experience working in the field: 10 percent of our participants were in their first year in the classroom, while 40 percent had worked with young children for more than 10 years.

We began our data collection by distributing a lengthy questionnaire to 81 male early childhood teachers. Although this sample size seems small, we had to reach out to 82 sites just to find this many male early childhood educators. Interestingly, though many of the centers we initially contacted employed no male educators, several of the sites employed a number of men, perhaps reflecting a hiring priority on the part of administrators to develop a more gender-balanced teaching team. The questionnaire was completed by 46 respondents and gathered quantitative and qualitative data about the educators' career trajectories, teacher preparation, compensation, professional development experiences, and mentoring.

After analyzing the questionnaire data, we began a series of interviews. We interviewed early childhood administrators, both male and female, to gain their perspectives on the experiences of their male staff and to gather their recommendations for increasing male participation in the early childhood workforce. Next, we completed interviews with 16 male early childhood educators who represented a cross section of our questionnaire participants. Interviewees provided more in-depth narratives about the topics covered in the questionnaire and their reflections on gender and masculinity in their work as male educators.

During the course of our outreach to identify research participants, we learned that one male administrator (the fourth author) working at a multisite agency had convened semiregular meetings of a cohort of male early childhood educators. In our analysis of the interview data, we learned that many of our participants felt isolated and would benefit from joining with other male educators to discuss the particular circumstances of their work as male educators. To learn more about how this support group functioned for the male educators, we conducted a focus group with the participants. In the final section of this article, we describe our recommendations for replicating this model.

Finally, we developed a draft of the implications for policy and practice that emerged from our study and convened a focus group of early childhood



administrators to gather their feedback about our findings and implications. Their insights were invaluable in helping us to refine our recommendations to improve the recruitment and retention of high-quality male early childhood educators.

The pressure and promise of being a "male role model"

The participants in our study reported that they are frequently told their commitment to their work is especially important because they are serving as male role models. Many of the men expressed pride at this

mantle—pride that can offset the disappointment of working in a profession that is not respected or compensated as it should be.

Some participants specifically felt positive about providing a male presence in the lives of children who do not live with their fathers. One participant explained that many of the children in his program

> come from a socioeconomic background where the father is not present in many homes. . . . So I take on the role of a father. For example, I've had many parents come in and say, "I'm not with their father. The father is not in the picture. So I'm really happy . . . [my child has] a man for a teacher."

In the opening vignette, Javier similarly expressed satisfaction in being able to serve as a consistent and nurturing presence in the lives of young children, especially for young children whose primary early attachments are with women.

Male early childhood educators also often feel valued because of the assumption that their presence is a tool for classroom management. One male special educator recalled that a mother told him, "Use the male figure voice, because his grandpa, my father, does that to him and he listens." Other participants in our study echoed this sentiment, explaining that colleagues, families, and administrators expect that their presence will bring order and discipline to the classroom.

Yet, in the context of an early childhood classroom, many male educators are equally aware that their presence can be experienced as intimidating. One participant explained, "I'm not normally a person who raises their voice a lot. But when I do . . . I feel like I have to be more careful. I don't want to come off as being scary or scaring a kid." Remaining calm and caring when helping children resolve conflicts or responding to challenging behavior is, of course, best practice for all educators—but this male educator shows that even a small slip in his professional demeanor may be perceived as having serious consequences. Thus, male educators feel that they must walk a fine line, expected to deploy their masculinity as a tool of control while also providing a caring model of attachment.

Male educators under suspicion

While many participants find it highly gratifying to serve as a positive example, Javier's story in the opening vignette highlights a tension that many male early childhood educators feel. Javier felt gratified at being able to offer a hug to comfort a child, but he quickly self-corrected to explain that his affection would be expressed as a "side hug." Nearly all of the male educators we interviewed for this study reported that they had faced some amount of suspicion, sometimes leading to serious accusations, as a result of their decision to work with young children. One participant recalled being advised by his first supervisor,

> You're amazing. You're good with the kids. But to protect yourself, just make sure if somebody needs to use the bathroom or needs changing to call somebody for help, or make sure that somebody's there with you. Because you're a male and you just want to avoid any issues.

Another participant shared his female colleague's caution that "if a child says I touched the child, the parent's not going to think anything. But if they hear that you did, then that would seem weird." Many of our participants reported facing this double standard. When working with young children, educators express their nurturance through positive, healthy touch. Yet when asked why more men do not enter the field, one participant explained, "A lot of these guys now don't want to teach because of all the bad things that are

happening. Especially the little kids! They don't want to teach the little kids." When male educators attempt to express affection for young children, they may face scrutiny and suspicion that puts their livelihoods and reputations at risk.

Another participant hoped that his presence as a male educator could allow him to offer a more complex expression of gender, showing that men can behave in ways that are often thought of as feminine as well as in masculine ways. He explained,

> They want to see that I am rough and I'll be tough on them if I need to, but at the same time, present this piece of tenderness. . . . So I'm playing two different roles here. I can be both of those things at the same time. I'll give you a hug to show what it means that I can be both sides, that any male can be both sides.

Ultimately, if we want men to join and remain in the early childhood workforce, we must confront the pressures that inhibit male educators from bringing their full selves to the classroom.

Supporting male early childhood educators

Many participants in our research cited inadequate wages and benefits as an explanation for why there are so few men in the field of early childhood. The low status of the profession and levels of compensation are endemic to the field and a problem for male and female educators alike (Whitebook, McLean, & Austin 2016). Nonetheless, the male educators we interviewed were all deeply committed to working with young children despite these challenges. In addition to addressing issues of compensation, however, several recommendations emerged from our study that would directly address challenges to the recruitment and retention of male early childhood educators.

Targeted recruitment

In New York City, programs like the NYC Teaching Fellows program have addressed high-needs areas in education (e.g., math, special education, bilingual education) by engaging in targeted recruitment and providing tuition remission and other supports for qualified individuals who make a commitment to working in these areas. The field of early childhood would benefit from programs like this to attract male educators.

Additionally, while our sample was small, we found that compared with their White and Asian American peers, far fewer African American and Latino male educators held the positions of lead teacher or coteacher; on average, they also had lower levels of educational attainment. Given recent research demonstrating the great benefits for all children in having a more racially diverse and representative education workforce (Cherng & Halpin 2016), development of the early childhood pipeline should prioritize African American and Latino male educators. New programs like NYC Men Teach seek to bring men of color into K–12 classrooms, but they have not yet focused on recruiting men into early childhood education specifically.

NYC Men Teach

NYC Men Teach was launched by the Office of the Mayor's Young Men's Initiative in 2015, with the goal of adding 1,000 Black, Latino, and Asian American teachers to public school classrooms across the city. In partnership with the NYC Department of Education, the City University of New York, and other local colleges and organizations, NYC Men Teach supports aspiring educators and offers mentorship, pathways to certification and other professional development, networking opportunities, and more. Learn about their programs at **https://nycmenteach.org.**

Professional development for administrators

The male educators we interviewed were best able to thrive when they worked for administrators who were sensitive to the particular pressures they face. Mentoring by both male and female administrators helped our participants to navigate challenging situations, such as when families expressed discomfort with their presence in the classroom. Many of the administrators we interviewed made a specific effort to hire and mentor male educators because they saw

the great value of a gender-balanced workforce at their sites. However, the majority of early childhood sites we initially contacted did not employ any male educators.

While it appears to be true that few men seek to enter the field, administrators' unconscious biases about men who wish to work with young children may also have an impact. Professional development experiences could offer early childhood administrators opportunities to understand the value of a more gender-balanced workforce and to build the skills administrators need to mentor and support men working in the profession.

Support groups for male early childhood educators

To begin to address issues of racial justice, many institutions have developed race-based affinity groups to encourage people to explore issues of privilege and oppression in safe spaces (Parsons & Ridley 2012). As men are a distinct minority in the field of early childhood education, they may benefit from the development of support groups specifically for male educators.

The fourth author worked as an administrator at an agency that operated multiple early childhood sites. Because each site included only one male educator, he saw the need to create a structure that would allow them to collectively process some of the particular issues they faced as male educators.

Initially, the administrator created a cohort specifically for male educators of color, but later the group was expanded to include a White male educator who faced many of the same issues the others were exploring. The cohort began by establishing healthy norms for their discussions (see "Establishing a Support Group" on this page). They developed a sense of solidarity by sharing the narratives of their own educational and career trajectories.

As the meetings continued, the administrator facilitated the sessions to enable the male educators to talk through what he called "dilemmas of practice." Participants shared and generated strategies for dealing with issues such as what to do when children want to sit on the teacher's lap; how to respond to a parent who does not recognize a male educator as the teacher; and how to manage the expectation that male educators will do physical labor (e.g., moving boxes) that takes them out of the classroom.

Establishing a Support Group

- Set norms that make group members feel supported and safe
  - Maintain confidentiality
  - Engage in accountable talk that is respectful of male educators and colleagues
  - Have the courage to be vulnerable; by sharing feelings and experiences fully and candidly, all participants have the opportunity to gain insight and support
  - Be generous and willing to take risks
- Focus sessions on specific topics (including others suggested by group members)
  - Reflecting on personal educational and career trajectories
  - Sharing dilemmas of practice
  - Developing strategies for responding to challenges
  - Networking and career planning
  - Exploring intersectional identities (e.g., gender, race, sexuality)

After each meeting, the administrator distributed notes from the session, which helped participants to continue to reflect on their work together.

At our focus group with the men's cohort, participants shared that they had gained invaluable support from these sessions. As one participant reflected, "Since this field has mostly been more devoted towards women, they can't really relate to a lot of things that us men go through. So when we want to talk about it, we can't really talk about it to them because they haven't experienced those things." Another participant described the men's cohort as a "safe space" where he had the opportunity to be vulnerable and to learn how other male educators handled the specific challenges that result from being one of a few men working in the field. The primary obstacle the group faced was that their time for professional development was limited, and the men's cohort meetings could be seen as conflicting with their need to attend workshops with their female colleagues. Despite these challenges, the positive potential of this program should be explored further and replicated elsewhere.

Conclusion

Despite the obstacles, many of the men in our study described the great sense of pride and power that comes from contributing to this important field. One participant reflected,

> Do I ever ask myself, "Why am I a guy teaching preschool?" Sometimes I do. But the positive feelings I get from this job outweigh any negative feelings. . . . I can't picture myself, like, working as a trader in a stock market. Because I wouldn't be working with people anymore. In the business world, the bottom line is how much money can you make for the company. . . . In education, the bottom line is how many children can you help? . . . In what other profession do you know that the work you do now will forever affect the students you teach into their future?

In order to increase gender balance, we must be intentional and proactive in how we recruit and retain men in the field—especially men of color. In this article, we have suggested some concrete actions that we hope will inform efforts to build the profession in ways that will benefit children, families, and educators.

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Applying Knowledge to Practice

How Degree Apprenticeships Support Early Educators

Alison Lutton

Over the past 125 years, the early education profession has been through several periods of redefinition, growth, and change. Today, the field is in the midst of another of those periods, with widespread calls for all teachers of infants through third graders to have associate or bachelor's degrees in early childhood education and to receive fair compensation.

But what will new higher education expectations mean for current teachers without college degrees? Can we simultaneously reach new degree goals and address the equity barriers in our college education system? Among the people most affected are current and future teachers who are of color, who are not proficient in English, who are supporting or living in low-income households, who are working full-time and can attend college only part-time, and who are first-generation college students. What supports need to be created and what structural and

systemic barriers need to be eliminated to ensure that new degree requirements are attainable for all? And if aspiring teachers succeed, will teacher compensation rise sufficiently to keep these newly degreed and in-demand teachers in the field? New approaches to registered apprenticeships for early educators are emerging to tackle these challenges.

"Even for teachers with talent . . . this would be impossible without the apprenticeship project. For many of us in the field, college wasn't on the books; it had to become a dream that we adopted." **—Kim, *Center Director***

On-the-job learning

Learning to teach through practice in the field is not a new idea. Research on ways to increase the quality of teacher education programs has long called for earlier and more substantive field or clinical practice; active learning embedded in practice; closer relationships between higher education programs, schools, and community partners; and investment in teacher education programs to support increased faculty time in the field (NCATE 2010).

On-the-job learning designed as career progression for those already working in education settings is not new either. For decades teacher residencies and Grow Your Own programs have helped aspiring K–12 teachers—educators who currently work as tutors, as paraprofessionals, and in other educational roles that do not require teacher education degrees or licensure—to make the transition to licensed teacher positions. Typically, these programs are partnerships between school districts and institutions of higher education that closely integrate the degree coursework with on-the-job learning and practice under an experienced mentor teacher. Like apprenticeships, these programs are often part of a strategic plan to attract and retain more teachers of color and teachers who are bilingual and to also address some of the social inequities in child and adult education (Partee 2014; Muñiz 2018).

Teachers who have completed degrees, earned licensure, and begun working in the field also benefit from ongoing professional development. We know that professional development is most effective when it incorporates active learning embedded in practice; creates time and space for teachers to collaborate with peers; offers a clear vision of and models high-quality teaching practice; and provides coaching and expert support tailored to individual needs. Effective professional development also encourages reflection, feedback, and change in teaching practice and is sustained for long enough that teachers have time to learn, explore, implement and change practices (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner 2017).

One way to engage experienced teachers and aspiring teachers in on-the-job training together is through apprenticeships. Both the mentor teachers and the apprentices benefit from being part of a peer learning community focused on reflection, growth, and change.

"I have been in this field for 17 years, in and out of college. It is a challenge to afford it and take care of my family at the same time. I was skeptical about this but decided it was worth another try. This time I have so much support. I can call for help anytime. I got a raise and a promotion to Head Start assistant teacher. And I used to be terrified about talking in front of people like this; now I can do it. This has given me confidence. Now I'm earning As and have a 3.57 GPA."**—Rashied, *Apprentice***

"I had no idea what I was getting into as a coach. This has really pushed me to work on my professionalism, how I speak to people, how I solve problems. My own education was a train wreck. It was like a jungle that gave me no idea where to start. Now we learn from each other. . . . I use those apprentice competency lists as a coach but also for myself in my own classroom. . . . Other teachers now come to Rashied when thinking about going back to school. Teaching is a science and the whole program is based on that. This helps us refine our skills—it's not easy. I've also increased my confidence as a teacher and as a college student. Now I'm halfway through my master's degree."
—Tilea, *Rashied's Coach*

Registered Apprenticeships

Formal apprenticeship programs are partnerships between employers, training providers, and the employee-apprentice; they provide on-the-job training and practice in the skills of a specific occupation and culminate in an industry-recognized credential. The apprentice is paired with a coworker mentor who already holds the credential. Not all apprenticeship programs are registered. Registered Apprenticeship programs are approved by the US Department of Labor through its state offices and may qualify for state and federal funding.

Registered Apprenticeships must document the competencies apprentices are developing, the on-the-job training format and hours completed, and the assessment of apprentices' competency. In addition, they must provide and document wage or salary increases linked to improved skills—what's often referred to as an earn-while-you-learn model. Registered Apprenticeships include both on-the-job learning under a mentor coworker and related classroom instruction. The length of registered apprenticeships ranges from one to six years, but all programs must result in a credential that is recognized in the occupation.

Registered Apprenticeships for early childhood educators are active in at least 11 states today (Lutton 2018). In early childhood education apprenticeships, an intermediary organization often sponsors the project, providing coordination across multiple early care and education employers. Apprenticeship competencies and training most often lead to the Child Development Associate credential (CDA) and higher education partners sometimes agree to award credits to those apprentices who choose to go on to degree programs.

Designing apprenticeship for degree completion

Apprenticeship in the United States typically culminates in an industry credential and is most common in occupations that do not require an academic degree. Designing a degree apprenticeship requires consideration of additional higher education quality assurance concerns. These programs must meet not only the Registered Apprenticeship standards of the Department of Labor but also the requirements of state higher education systems, state approval of degree programs leading to teacher licensure, and national professional accrediting agencies.

Pennsylvania is engaged in some new thinking about partnerships, supports, and funding for apprenticeships as part of an accelerated pathway to degree attainment for early educators working in child care settings. Project partners are integrating an apprenticeship pathway into associate and bachelor's early childhood degree programs; aligning apprenticeship competencies and course outcomes with national standards of the profession; providing essential supports to apprentices as adult college students with full-time jobs; providing capacity-

building supports to community child care employers to meet their responsibilities as partners in a Registered Apprenticeship; and identifying what it will take to build and sustain an effective program over time.

To accelerate degree completion for early childhood teachers, apprenticeship programs must intentionally design supports that can address the degree completion gap and the stratification of the current workforce. Few teachers in any setting are paid salaries comparable to those of people in other professions with similar degree and licensure requirements in their home states—but teachers in early grades often make less than their peers in higher grades, and those working outside public school settings typically make even less. Likewise, in early care and education settings, infant and toddler teachers make less than those working with preschoolers. Few people working in early care and education have health insurance, and one in seven lives below the official poverty line (Gould 2015).

In addition to inadequate compensation, the early childhood workforce also has serious challenges with racial disparities. White educators are more likely than their Black and Hispanic colleagues to have access to higher education and therefore to higher-paying positions; and even after controlling for factors like credentials, a wage gap remains that advantages White early childhood educators (Ulrich, Hamm, & Herzfeldt-Kamprath 2016).

The stratification in the workforce is in part the result of the systemic and structural class, racial, gender, and linguistic inequities that persist in our underfunded education system from birth through post-secondary education. Higher education institutions across the country have been engaged in multiple initiatives to increase degree retention and completion. A number of promising approaches have emerged, yet over the past two decades the degree attainment gap between White and Hispanic students has not changed, and the gap between White and Black students has grown slightly. Students from low-income households and those who are the first in their family to attend college remain four times more likely than their more advantaged peers to drop out after their first year. Promising strategies for supporting degree completion are often designed for students who attend college full time, but first-generation students, students with limited resources, and students of color are more likely to attend college part time while holding jobs that contribute essential financial support to their households (Mangan 2018).

Reaching a universal goal, like bachelor's degrees for all lead educators working across all early education programs, will require intensive and targeted efforts. The path for many early educators will begin with an associate degree from a local community college. Multiple strategies and pathways will be needed to meet needs and address barriers facing specific groups of students. One promising model is the Philadelphia Apprenticeship Project, which began with significant supports for members of the early childhood workforce who are working toward associate degrees and their employers.

> "When done well, ECE apprenticeships that aim for degree attainment need system change across workforce, education, early childhood, and higher education systems. There has to be a willingness to work closely with new partners to develop new advocates from the field and [from] inside multiple state offices."
> **– Cheryl Feldman, *The Training Fund***

The Philadelphia Apprenticeship Project model

The Philadelphia Apprenticeship Project, which is currently being adapted and expanded across the state of Pennsylvania, is a leader in new thinking about the goals, design, and funding of early childhood apprenticeship programs. The model is designed to coordinate and support capacity building across multiple child care employers and to meet the needs of early educators who must work full time while completing college degrees and who often face the challenges common to first-generation, low-income college students. As a Registered Apprenticeship and a degree apprenticeship, it is designed to ensure compliance with Department of Labor standards and Pennsylvania teacher education standards; it is also designed to support those degree programs which hold or are pursing accreditation from the NAEYC Commission on the Accreditation of Early Childhood Higher Education Programs.

Advancing the Profession

The National Association for Nursery Education (NANE), founded in 1929, changed its name in 1964 to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) to encompass the growing profession of educators for children from birth through age 8. Over the next two decades, NAEYC and other members of the field engaged in lively work and debate about our profession and professional development. The CDA and Council for Professional Recognition were established in the 1970s. During the 1980s, NAEYC launched accreditation for early learning programs serving young children and issued guidelines for associate and bachelor's degree programs and advanced early childhood teacher education programs, which were quickly adopted by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education and incorporated into state licensing systems. Later, NAEYC held the first Institute for Professional Development (now Professional Development Institute, PLI). States began work on core bodies of knowledge, competencies, and career pathways for early educators, especially for those working in child care and Head Start. And the first apprenticeship training program for early educators was established in West Virginia in 1989.

Today NAEYC offers national accreditation to both associate and bachelor's degree programs, and the profession of early education is in another period of progress. For educators working in early childhood education settings, the goal line is moving from a CDA to a college degree, underscoring the need to improve early childhood teacher training and education programs and to enhance state requirements for early childhood teacher licensure. As state and community initiatives expand, apprenticeship projects can provide critical supports for the completion of high-quality degree programs for working early educators.

The goal is a practical, meaningful career pathway for the early childhood workforce: the Philadelphia area project began with an apprenticeship pathway through one associate degree program that already had program-to-program articulation agreements with bachelor's-level teacher certification programs. It is now expanding, with additional community college partners and a new university partner that offers a bachelor's degree program apprenticeship pathway. While the model is evolving as it expands in response to local conditions in new communities, some components are critical for successful replication. In the remainder of this article, I describe the Philadelphia model by explaining its essential partners and supports.

Essential partners

The Philadelphia model relies on three essential partners working closely together: the intermediary organization, higher education programs, and worksite technical assistants. Each partner is supported and funded to take on critical work to sustain the project and address challenges. While each has a primary set of responsibilities, they work collaboratively to solve problems as they arise while remaining focused on their core workforce development goals.

The *intermediary organization* operates the multiemployer Registered Apprenticeship program. Recognizing the capacity challenges that face early care and education employers, and the need to engage many small employers in one unified project, it is the primary liaison with the Department of Labor and takes on the responsibility of ensuring that the project is in compliance with the state and federal requirements for Registered Apprenticeships. It recruits early care and education employers, works closely with them to retain participants in the program, provides a central contact person to support apprentices, and leverages public and private workforce development funding to deploy the supports needed by apprentices and their employers. In Philadelphia, the District 1199C Training & Upgrading Fund (The Training Fund) serves this role. The Training Fund brings extensive experience in workforce development, registered apprenticeships across multiple occupations (including experience with CDA apprenticeship), and adult education programs such as bridge programs that prepare working adults for college entry.

The *higher education programs* design the apprenticeship pathway through their specific degree programs, determine which courses or program components can be completed through on-the-job learning, and provide individualized and cohort semester-by-semester course maps and advising to guide apprentices to degree completion; in addition, they are developing quality assurance processes that are aligned with institutional, state, and accrediting agency requirements and articulation agreements relevant to their teacher education programs. They also work with the intermediary organization to identify and recruit new employers, to prepare for each new cohort of apprentices, and to monitor and support the progress of current apprentices. In the Philadelphia area, the Community College of Philadelphia (CCP), Delaware County Community College (DCCC), and Arcadia University have current cohorts of apprentices enrolled in degree programs. Both community colleges offer revised and contextualized developmental general education coursework with early childhood content. Although these developmental courses generally do not result in college credit, they are designed to support success in the courses that do lead to the associate degree.

The *technical assistants* provide on-site support to the apprentices, the employers, and the coworkers identified as the apprentices' mentors. In Philadelphia, technical assistants help the mentors develop strengths-based strategies for working with apprentices and deepen the mentors' understanding of the competencies that the apprentices need to develop and how these on-the-job competencies are aligned with the apprentices' college coursework. This onsite work can include providing technical assistance to the center directors too, with the goals of strengthening human resources departments' processes and manuals, introducing the apprenticeship to staff, aligning earn-while-you-learn wage increases for apprentices with centers' salary scales, and developing a leadership team of increasingly skilled and qualified early educators.

Essential supports

It's important that apprenticeship programs leading to associate degrees be designed specifically for part-time college students who are already working in early care and education. The Philadelphia model includes the following eight supports for both apprentices and their employers.

1. **Help with on-site apprenticeship functions:** Due to the underfunded and fragmented nature of the current early care and education system, employers operate with very tight budget margins, high staff turnover, and a shortage of well-qualified teachers. They rarely have the capacity to provide on-site professional development, qualified and stable on-site mentors, or the wage increases required by registered apprenticeships. To address these issues, the intermediary organization hosts periodic meetings of participating center directors and takes responsibility for data collection and reporting, assuring that the project is in compliance with federal and state Registered Apprenticeship requirements.
2. **Assistance with the costs of college:** To be eligible for participation, employers must be enrolled in the T.E.A.C.H. Teacher Education and Compensation Helps Early Childhood Pennsylvania Scholarship Program. This program covers most of the cost of tuition, books, and transportation for apprentices. It also covers most of the cost of release time so that apprentices can attend class, study, and handle personal needs that otherwise cannot fit into school and work schedules. To protect employers' investments in their staff, T.E.A.C.H.

requires that scholarship recipients agree to continue working in their current early childhood programs for one year after each scholarship year.

3. **Assistance with college readiness:** To be eligible for participation in the degree apprenticeship, apprentices must have completed a CDA and meet the admission requirements of the degree program. The colleges and intermediary organization work as partners to provide college preparation and bridge courses as needed, facilitate study groups, and help apprentices navigate the higher education system. In both community colleges, the early childhood and general education faculties partner to contextualize developmental (usually non-credit-bearing) courses, using early childhood content in English and math courses.
4. **Increased compensation:** To be eligible for participation, all employers must agree to sponsor employees in the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program, which requires that they provide release time and either a stipend or a raise at the end of each scholarship year, aligning with the Registered Apprenticeship earn-while-you-learn model. The Philadelphia project designed four wage increases for the apprentices based on hours worked, progress in the on-the-job competencies, course credits earned, and degree attainment. Each apprentice's coach also receives a stipend. (The stipend covers the additional responsibilities related to mentoring and monitoring progress; coaching meetings occur during regularly scheduled work hours, time that is already paid.) The intermediary organization works with employers to monitor, strategize, and problem solve as they implement these compensation requirements.

5. **Counseling:** The T.E.A.C.H. office provides a designated personal counselor for all scholarship recipients to assist with scholarship management and career development. Higher education programs provide faculty advisors for all students to assist with course selection, progression through degree completion requirements, and accessing financial aid and other campus student support services. Faculty advisors create individual semester-by-semester course maps that allow apprentices to complete on-campus (or online) courses on a part-time schedule and simultaneously complete additional courses during work hours through the apprenticeship program. As a result, apprentices can progress at a full-time pace, completing an associate degree in as quickly as two-and-a-half years. As with all college students, the need for developmental coursework, repetition of a course, or pauses in course progression due to life events will increase time to degree completion. Along the way, faculty advisors assist the apprentice with course selection and registration as prescribed in the individualized course map, working with apprentices to adjust the map and to access tutoring and other student supports as needed. The intermediary organization also provides a counselor to support the apprentice as they navigate workplace and college requirements.
6. **High-quality degree programs:** Both the Community College of Philadelphia and the Delaware County Community College are participants in the Achieving the Dream project, which is committed to improving the education, services, and inclusiveness of the nation's community colleges. DCCC's early childhood associate degree

program holds accreditation from NAEYC with multiple successful renewals. CCP's program is engaged in accreditation self-study work. In both programs, on-the-job competencies are closely aligned with college courses and with the 2009 NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation. All of the Philadelphia-area higher education partners are engaged with the new statewide higher education apprenticeship network in developing a quality assurance framework for apprenticeship processes and outcomes. They are also planning ahead to keep the state-approved on-the-job apprenticeship competencies aligned with updated NAEYC competencies and standards for early educators, which are expected later this year.

7. **An effective higher education pathway:** The ability to offer substantial, high-quality early childhood content and practice in an associate degree that transfers is key to this apprenticeship model. Both CCP and DCCC associate degree programs include 30 credits of early childhood coursework, which make up approximately 50 percent of the program. Both have articulation agreements with bachelor's-level early childhood teacher education programs; these, in turn, offer pathways to state Pre-K–4 teacher licensure. The new bachelor's degree apprenticeship program at Arcadia University is part of an accelerated BA program designed for transfer students already employed in child care, Head Start, and Pre-K settings.
8. **Steady and sustaining funding:** While early childhood apprenticeship is not new, few projects have proven to be sustainable over time or to be effectively integrated into degree programs. Steady, sustaining funding for each partner and for student scholarships is essential to successful outcomes. The Philadelphia Apprenticeship Project is now part of a Pennsylvania apprenticeship project that leverages both public and private workforce development and early childhood education dollars, at both local and state levels, with support from the Philadelphia Mayor's Office of Education, the Pennsylvania Department of Labor, and the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning. All of the project partners bring expertise in workforce development and early childhood; but even strong partners need substantial, ongoing project funding to support staff engagement in designing and sustaining the project, identification of specific barriers to degree completion for the apprentices, and delivery of supports that target those barriers. Because the early childhood workforce is not adequately compensated, steady sources of funding must be identified to ensure that current and aspiring educators of young children do not bear the financial cost of earning degrees (NASEM 2018).

Conclusion

Almost 10 years ago, a report from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) supported transforming teacher education to include more clinical practice faculty, more job-embedded learning, and closer and more strategic partnerships between higher education programs, schools, and early learning programs. But the report pointed out that this would require changes in program structure, faculty staffing, and financing that will not happen without specific investment (NCATE 2010).

Early childhood apprenticeship programs that are embedded in early educator degree programs hold great promise as a strategy to enhance the knowledge and

skills of the early childhood workforce. Well-designed and well-funded apprenticeship programs can be part of a larger effort to

- Develop and sustain education and compensation strategies that address the racial, economic, and linguistic inequities which continue to divide and stratify the early education workforce
- Strengthen higher education programs and their partnerships with community children's centers and schools
- Build administrator and teacher leadership capacity within centers and schools to improve program quality for children and job quality for early educators
- Build local, state, and national pipelines for the future early educators and early education faculty that we need

Apprenticeship programs provide invaluable supports for members of the early education workforce now and enable them to see the early care and education profession as one where they have a future. In the words of one apprentice, Caitlyn,

> I started and stopped so many times, discouraged. This time I could see a way to finish an associate degree, but I didn't have BA on my radar. Now I do. And the sequence of raises mean I no longer have to work a second job. One concern was leaving my second job to take more courses. I needed help with time management. It is so helpful that our coaches have been through college—they know how it feels when looking at that paper deadline. And there is an impact on kids and our program; now we really focus on quality assurances. A teacher's best resource is other teachers. Talking together, we are always reminded of our core values. It's all scaffolding, it's all linked. We spend a lot of time talking about what quality looks like. When a teacher has the confidence to set a bucket and two cups in front of a child and articulate the fine motor skills, the math concepts and science concepts that we're exploring, you know, then everything changes.

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Personalized Professional Development

How Teachers Can Use Videos to Improve Their Practice

Rachel E. Schachter and Hope Kenarr Gerde

"In reflecting and in retrospect, [the children] are not real good with irregular plurals, and so putting 'mice' in was probably not a good choice on my part. I probably should have thought more about the pictures that I chose because [the children] still say 'mouses.' They don't say 'mice.'"

Jacki, a prekindergarten teacher, is reflecting as she watches herself lead a puzzle activity in which children match rhyming picture pairs. Considering the children's inability to find a matching picture for the word *mice*, she realizes that part of the problem was that the children had not yet learned many irregular plurals. A little later in the video, she sees that

the children had difficulty labeling the word *mop*. Reflecting on that moment, Jacki suggests that her lesson might have gone better if the children had more background knowledge about what a mop is and how it is used.

By watching herself and the children participate in this activity, Jacki identifies a need in her teaching—to consider children's current background knowledge when selecting and using materials.

Engaging teachers in self-reflection by watching videos of their teaching is a powerful approach to professional development that can lead to meaningful changes in teachers' practices (Moon 1999; Sheridan et al. 2009). This article provides theoretical and research-based support for using videos for self-reflection to enhance teaching practice. It also offers practical guidance for engaging in self-reflection in classrooms and programs.

Personalized, reflective professional development

Research conducted over the past two decades indicates that to be effective, professional development must be ongoing and must provide feedback on teachers' individual classroom practices. Short one-off trainings—which are common in early childhood and K–12 education—do not provide enough intensity or enough connections to practice for teachers to develop skills for using new knowledge in the classroom (Wayne et al. 2008). All too often, the result is no added learning for teachers or children (Garet et al. 2001; Borko 2004). It seems that long-term, ongoing, classroom-based professional development is more effective for allowing teachers time to practice and refine new strategies (Yoon et al. 2007; Desimone 2009). Importantly, teachers have reported that they prefer to engage in long-term, focused, and intense professional development (Garet et al. 2001). Yet intensive, ongoing professional development programs are not the norm (Landry et al. 2006; Wasik & Hindman 2011).

With a relatively small investment in video technology (as basic as a smartphone, tripod, and secure video storage), centers and schools can create their own highly effective, meaningful professional development centered on self-reflection. Using videos of practice provides an individualized approach to professional development, allowing teachers to take the lead in facilitating their own learning. Engaging in video-based self-reflection has been identified as an effective professional learning technique with the capacity to improve teachers' practice, promoting children's knowledge and skills (Powell et al. 2010) and enhancing their social and emotional development (Pianta et al. 2008). Videos allow teachers to critically evaluate their skills, test out variations in their practices, and consider how different strategies ultimately benefit the children (Hammerness et al. 2005).

Enhancing prekindergarten teachers' practice

Viewing videos of their teaching across a range of instructional contexts provides opportunities for teachers to identify key areas in which practice can be enhanced. For example, when watching a video of herself leading a cooking activity, Amanda observed, "I probably didn't give them the opportunity to really answer my question. . . . I feel like I probably could have waited a little longer for them to answer that."

In this case, Amanda made a very powerful observation about her interactions with children, noticing that she needed to leave more wait time before giving them the answer. Similarly, when watching herself lead a literacy activity during the morning meeting, Beth said, "I should have said, 'See the letter.' Not 'See the sound.'" Here, Beth is refining her practice to be more precise with her word choices, which will help increase children's understanding.

These examples illustrate how reviewing videos of practice allows teachers to identify their own instruction-related needs, improving the professional learning experience (Hammerness et al. 2005). Specifically, engaging in self-reflection using video recordings can help teachers enhance practice by promoting critiques of practice, demonstrating teaching strengths, learning more about children's development, and identifying needed changes to the environment.

Promoting critiques of practice

Reflecting on recordings of practice is a powerful way to improve teaching because it provides the opportunity to think about what might not be working in the way intended and what could be modified to be more effective. While watching herself lead group time, Amanda reflected, "I'm losing Wells. He's over it. . . . I feel like I'm critiquing myself through this. . . . I need to get a fidget toy for him or something to keep him more on track." By being able to focus on Wells, Amanda identified a way to improve her large group instruction by providing a multisensory manipulative for a child. Although teachers do attend to each child as much as possible when teaching, videos allow teachers to review a session repeatedly, focusing on one child at a time.

Teachers need to be able to tweak their practice over time, making small changes as they go, which can add up to quantifiable changes in instruction (Kennedy 2010). Video self-reflection facilitates this process. Another example of a teacher reflecting on her instruction is Jacki observing herself reading a storybook and leading a follow-up activity. She observed, "I probably would have read the book again and have talked about more things in the book to give them some more ideas." Again, this reflection was a chance to think about what did not work well during an activity and identify new strategies to try the next time.

Demonstrating teaching strengths

Self-reflection is not only about identifying areas of practice to improve but also about recognizing and building on strengths. For example, when observing her morning meeting, Linda noted, "Look at how I'm going through each and every one and watching, and that's important." Linda saw that she attended to each individual child in her classroom and included all of them in the conversation.

Recognizing teaching strengths can help teachers identify practices they want to continue, and it can help to consider how they can leverage these strengths as opportunities when they reflect on areas of their practice they want to enhance (Mills 2017). Similarly, recognizing strengths helps teachers feel more confident. As Diane reflected, "I feel like the kids are having fun. And I feel like the kids are learning, and that's the most important thing."

Learning more about children's development

Through reflecting on practice, teachers may also be able to learn more about children's knowledge, skills, and development. Watching children engage in conversations while also engaging in an activity, Caitlin observed, "The conversations they're having while they do this activity sometimes relate to the activity and sometimes are completely out of the blue. . . . But that's interesting too because . . . I can tell then what kids can still do what they're supposed to be doing or still focus on the activity while they're having a conversation." Watching this video showed Caitlin what the children were doing as she circulated around the room and helped her learn more about the children's abilities.

Watching a video of a letter–sound matching lotto game that involved placing a token over the picture that corresponded to a letter sound from an audio recording, Abbey recognized a child who might need extra support. She said that during the activity, "I didn't notice that he got off the frame [missed several matches]," seeing that the child was not able to follow along with the audio recording. Video self-reflection provides opportunities for teachers to have different insights into their practice (Schachter 2014), including the opportunity to see and learn more about the children in their classroom.

Identifying needed changes to the classroom environment

With videos, teachers observe details about the physical environment of their classroom that they might not have noticed while teaching. For example, when watching a morning meeting, Abbey said, "I don't get to notice how loud it is. You know, there's so much extraneous noise. I had no idea—I'm so focused when we're there, but there's a lot of noise." This is critical, as noise can have negative impacts on both short- and long-term learning (Klatte, Bergström, & Lachmann 2013). In watching a large group activity where she used a flip chart to track the day's date, Jacki reported, "I need to move those [date] numbers because the bookcase is not very stable—and they all want to see as the numbers are being changed. So I may put them on the chalk ledge."

By reflecting on videos of practice, these teachers were able to think about changes they could make to their practice and their classrooms as well as learn more about the children's development. Here again, this process allows teachers to make small changes to the environment that can have big, long-term impacts on practice and children's learning (Kennedy 2010).

Applying new knowledge or skills

Video self-reflection can also be a tool for practicing and extending content learned in other professional development offerings, like workshops or conference presentations. Teachers frequently attend one-time trainings that do not provide opportunities to practice using new knowledge or skills in the classroom. After teachers engage in such a training, they can facilitate their implementation and refinement of new knowledge and skills by recording their attempts to use the new skills in their classrooms. This work may be done individually or in groups if teachers are trying to systemically adopt a new practice. Keeping a series of such videos is a great way to document progress.

Following up after an in-service training on how to effectively praise children, Amanda reflected that she did a good job in one of her videos of group time. Focusing on one child she needs to redirect and encourage, she noted, "I'm trying to focus more on the good things he is doing." In the training, she learned that if you "focus on that one child doing all negative and all the other children are doing . . . what you're asking them to do . . . your attention's in the wrong spot." In response, she had been trying to work more positive reinforcement and effective praise into her interactions and was able to see that progress in her teaching through video self-reflection.

The reflection process

Current research recommends that teachers begin the reflection process by having a clear purpose for what they hope to achieve (Escamilla & Meier 2018). It could be focusing on specific teaching practices, such as using open-ended questions and extended conversations to build understanding of a science topic or engaging children in number path games to develop their concept of one-to-one correspondence and to promote self-regulation. Teachers can use reflection to examine their communication with coteachers or assistant teachers as a way to strengthen collaboration within the teaching team. In order to support successful use of video, at the start of the process it is helpful for teachers to identify specific purposes for watching the video and goals for their teaching. Then, teachers can monitor or assess their progress via self-reflection—a critical step in improving practice (Buysse, Castro, & Peisner-Feinberg 2010).

Frequent, purposeful review of videos of the targeted practice, perhaps once a week, provides time to reflect on how things are going, improvements that have been made, and areas in need of further development. When watching, it is helpful to have questions to guide the reflection, such as the following:

- What do I notice about my targeted practice?
- How are children responding to my language or actions?
- What was successful about my teaching here?
- Is there something that I could do differently?
- Does the environment support my targeted practice and children's learning?

A cycle of video, reflection, and refinement can continue until the teacher feels that he or she has mastered the strategies and accomplished the specific goals. Then, the reflection cycle can begin again by reviewing videos to identify new goals. This is an ongoing cycle targeting meaningful practices, enhancing teaching practices and child outcomes over time (Pianta et al. 2008; Powell et al. 2010).

Engaging teachers in meaningful reflection can occur only when a program allows teachers an atmosphere in which practice can be critiqued without judgment or punitive action. To grow, teachers must feel comfortable enough to take risks and try new skills. This can be a difficult process; as Beth observed, "Every time you think you got it down, there's something that screws it up." Teachers need time and support—with everyone understanding that meaningful change takes time.

It can be difficult to see oneself teaching and then to engage in a serious critique (alone or with others). Many teachers reported having "camera jitters" the first few times they were recorded, and one teacher even said that she was "dreading" watching herself the first time. Teachers and administrators should consider who is participating in the reflective process, especially in the beginning. If teachers are curious about their own practice, video self-reflection can be done individually with personal goals.

Reflecting on videos of practice can also be done as a collaborative professional development activity with coteachers or assistant teachers, other classroom teachers, specialists, coaches, and/or administrators. Working together as a community can be especially powerful for receiving feedback and working toward common goals (Ackerman 2008; Yilmaz & McMullen 2010) as long as all participants feel free to share their ideas, respect the practices of other teachers, and approach the critique of videos as constructive rather than punitive. It may be necessary for teachers to work in groups without administrators so that they feel comfortable watching and critiquing themselves.

Regardless, when working with others, it is important to establish guidelines in advance, to set parameters for discussions, and to ensure that everyone is comfortable (Rodgers 2006). For detailed examples illustrating the reflection process in action, see "Preparing for Evaluation with Video Self-Reflection," by Michelle Grantham-Caston and Cynthia DiCarlo, on pages 60-61.

Practical considerations

There are many practical considerations for engaging in this type of professional development. Here are four of the most crucial considerations to help teachers get started.

1. *Focus the recording on the target teacher*—Although this seems obvious, early childhood classrooms are busy, and children are often moving about.

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Preparing for Evaluation with Video Self-Reflection

Michelle Grantham-Caston and Cynthia DiCarlo

Sheila signs in to the early education and care center at 6:45 a.m.—30 minutes before the children will start to arrive. She wants to look over her lesson plan again, as she is not sure when the external evaluator will be coming for her observation. Although Sheila stayed after her shift yesterday to ensure all of her materials were together and she was prepared, she is still anxious about how her observation will go. She wants feedback on her teaching and interaction with the children, but there is barely enough time in the day to get everything done. She wants to learn how to work smarter in order to give the children in her care the best education she can.

Early childhood educators are eternally busy; they are also continuously bombarded with new curricula, instructional strategies, and evaluation methods. Although many early childhood educators understand the value of using state-of-the art, research-based practices, there is growing concern over how little time educators have to review their instruction (including the environments and activities they create), to document children's learning, and to reflect on the impact of their teaching.

Given the limited staff and resources of most early childhood programs, it may seem impossible to engage teachers in systemic professional development. But there is one option that is accessible, ongoing, and effective: video self-reflection. Many professions use videos to evaluate and improve performance. For example, athletes watch video clips the day after a game to improve their skills and to learn from their opponents; politicians critique videos of their speeches and review the reactions of their target audiences. For busy teachers, videos can be a powerful form of reflection because they allow teachers to watch without distractions their delivery of instruction and children's responses to it. This practice is becoming more widespread, particularly given its use by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and by researchers studying professional development strategies and effective teaching methods (Brownell et al. 2005; Cherrington & Loveridge 2014; Early et al. 2017).

> "We are going to do *what*?" Sheila hears herself exclaim as her director announces that, beginning immediately, each staff member is going to have to video record a segment of his or her teaching each week. "I do not want to be a movie star! I do not want to see myself on video," Sheila hears another teacher say. Although the director tries to frame it positively, saying, "You are all the stars of your classroom," that hardly helps dispel the utter panic in the room. The director tells staff they will be watching their teaching in order to improve. Sheila isn't sure what this means, or if she should even ask.

Although Sheila's fear is understandable, ongoing, classroom-based, personalized professional development is essential for teachers seeking to refine their practice—and reflection is a critical part of the process. "Reflection is an important human activity in which people recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it. It is this working with experience that is important in learning" (Boud, Keogh, & Walker 1985, 19). As Sheila is about to discover, reviewing videos of one's teaching is an excellent strategy for meaningful reflection.

Reflection works best with the guidance of a framework that focuses on specific questions to support targeted self-reflection (Calandra, Gurvitch, & Lund 2008). Some teachers may choose to select parts of existing frameworks, such as the Classroom Assessment Scoring System, known as CLASS (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre 2008) or the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Third Edition, known as ECERS-3 (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer 2014); others may decide to develop their own guiding questions (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson 2015).

If teachers use a reflective lens to view themselves on video and can avoid being judgmental, they may answer questions such as What else might be included that could enhance instruction?, Did the lesson go the way I intended?, What are the children in the environment doing?, and What went unnoticed in the moment of teaching as far as child development or guidance? Reflecting on these questions helps teachers identify their strengths and weaknesses, and helps them to consider how to build on their strengths.

> Sheila's fears are eased when her director tells the staff two things: (1) the videos will be used in conjunction with the state's teacher evaluation tool and will help the teachers improve their scores, and (2) the videos will be viewed only by the teacher and the director. Although initially uncomfortable, Sheila can see how using the state tool as a framework while watching herself and her students during lessons may help her improve her teaching.

The process

To get an adequate sample of instruction, teachers should plan for 15- to 20-minute videos (though their self-reflection may focus on a shorter segment of the video). Using the identified framework to pinpoint a specific aspect of instruction, the teacher or director can select a practice, center, or time of day to record the teaching sample.

For example, if a toddler teacher wanted to address the CLASS dimension "Regard for Student Perspectives," he may choose to make a video of himself engaging toddlers in conversations in the dramatic play center. He would score this dimension while watching his video, making note of situations in which he exhibited behaviors associated with that dimension and situations in which he might have missed opportunities to address the dimension. The director would also view the video according to this CLASS dimension and provide feedback. The teacher would have the benefit of the CLASS framework and an additional perspective from the director, who might help him appreciate his strengths and see opportunities he might have missed.

> Sheila sits down in the break room with her headphones on and watches her first video. She has a copy of the state assessment tool she will be using to reflect on her teaching. She takes a deep breath and presses *Play*. After an initial period of self-consciousness, she settles in to using the framework to comment on her teaching. It is not as bad as she thought it would be; she laughs at herself for initially putting off recording the video. After she finishes watching, she looks at her notes and makes some additions. She is excited about discussing her reflections with her director and getting feedback.

The payoff

Once teachers overcome the initial discomfort of watching themselves on video, they are able to assess meaningful aspects of their instruction that they may miss in the busyness of their day. Teachers are able to identify their areas of strength as well as areas of need, and the framework provides a shared vocabulary and focus for the teacher and the director.

> As Sheila enters the break room, she breathes a sigh of relief. She has just completed her planning meeting with the director, where she received feedback on this month's teaching video. The director was very supportive in pointing out the things Sheila excelled in. She also felt that Sheila had a much better understanding of not only *what* she needed to improve on, but the steps she needed to take to make the necessary improvements. In the break room, other teachers are talking about their teaching videos and are beginning to share teaching strategies.

Sometimes, teachers voluntarily start sharing their videos and learning from each other. In a recent study, teachers who engaged in video self-reflection created an informal learning community through discussion of their teaching videos (Grantham-Caston 2018). Teachers who were stronger in some areas offered insight and assistance to teachers who were struggling in those same areas. One teacher commented that this process helped her to see her worth as an educator and prompted her to seek state trainer certification in order to help other teachers. Other teachers noted the value of having both teacher-recorded and director-recorded videos, as that led to much greater variety in the times of day and types of lessons recorded.

> Sheila smiles as she thinks about her next state observation. She knows she will be much more at ease and better prepared. By the time her next state evaluation visit occurs, she will have used the video self-reflection process five more times. She now has the vocabulary and the awareness to contribute meaningfully to that conversation. Rather than be intimidated (as she had been previously), she is now confident and looking forward to the feedback as an opportunity to continue her growth as an early childhood professional.

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Teachers spend most of their time focusing their observations on children, so it seems natural to focus these recordings on children too. For self-reflection recordings, however, it is essential to focus on the teacher. At first, it might feel awkward; but teachers cannot self-reflect if they cannot see their behavior or hear their words. It is advisable to practice with the video equipment once or twice before trying to make a video to reflect on; consider the best place to put this equipment in order to hear or see the practices that are the focus of the reflection cycle.

2. *Plan recordings around learning goals*—It is not very efficient or realistic to record an entire day of teaching, nor would that be practical to use in the reflection process. Consider what strategies are being targeted and the teacher's professional learning goals. Then select what practice would be beneficial to reflect on, and identify a good time to record it. Having a specific target, like using spatial vocabulary (*above, behind, parallel*) during block play, makes self-reflection more practical and effective. (Remember, small changes that are part of an ongoing improvement process result in big changes over time.)

3. *Inform others about what you are doing*—Children, families, and colleagues need to be told why and when teachers are recording instruction. This may be particularly important for families, some of whom might be worried about their children being recorded. Families can be informed about the benefits of self-reflection for enhancing teachers' practice and how this is becoming common in teacher education. It is also necessary to check with program administrators before beginning this process, as there may be program-based rules for the use of electronic devices such as cellphones in the classroom, and families may need to sign permission forms.

4. *Do not share videos*—It is important to maintain control of and confidentiality with recordings, as they will contain not only one person's teaching but the activities of children, colleagues, and others in the classroom (such as parent volunteers). The same precautions should be taken with these videos as are taken with child assessment data and anecdotal records. After reviewing a captured recording for reflection, delete the recording or store it somewhere secure to ensure the children's privacy.

Conclusion

Using video to reflect on practice is a powerful way to engage teachers in personalized, ongoing, and intensive professional development. Engaging teachers in the reflection cycle is a cost-effective method for improving practice and celebrating strengths "in-house"—specifically targeting the needs of teachers and children in an individual early childhood program. This process can provide teachers with the opportunity to practice and receive feedback on skills learned in workshops or at conferences, which may improve the uptake of new ideas and strategies.

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NAEYCNEWS

The latest from the National Association for the Education of Young Children

FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Supporting Transitions

What We Can Learn from Snakes, Sea Lions, and a Flamingo Named Dinky

Amy O'Leary

In the November 2018 issue of *Young Children*, you met my mom. Did I mention that, in addition to being a facilitator and organizer of volunteer groups when I was growing up, she is a model of lifelong learning?

Mom has always been interested in history, nature, and human development. Animal Planet is one of her favorite networks. Many of our conversations include little-known facts about animals—for example, the habits of sloths (they aren't really lazy!) or the exotic mating rituals of different birds or the clever strategies of hyenas hunting their prey. Last spring, she discovered the TV program *The Zoo*, a behind-the-scenes look at the Bronx Zoo in New York. I have joined my mom as a fan and faithfully tune in on Sunday nights.

DE NUESTRA PRESIDENTA

Transiciones apoyadas.

Lo que podemos aprender de serpientes, leones marinos y una flamenca llamada Dinky

Amy O'Leary

En el número de noviembre de 2018 de *Young Children*, conocieron a mi mamá. ¿Mencioné que, además de ser facilitadora y organizadora de grupos de voluntarios durante mi niñez, es un ejemplo del aprendizaje durante toda la vida?

Mi mamá siempre ha tenido interés en la historia, la naturaleza y el desarrollo humano. Animal Planet es una de sus cadenas favoritas. Muchas de nuestras conversaciones incluyen detalles poco conocidos sobre animales—por ejemplo, las costumbres de

I learn something new every time I watch *The Zoo*. One episode in the first season—"Moving Day"—really struck a chord. It has three storylines: a staff member learns to feed a python; Franklin and McCabe, two young sea lions, have to be moved to a different zoo in New York City; and a flamingo named Dinky needs surgery.

The python part of the episode follows a keeper who is a gorilla expert as she learns to feed a giant African rock python. Bronx Zoo exhibits include species that would naturally be found together in the wild—like gorillas and pythons. This means that staff must learn how to give the best quality care to each of the various animals in the different exhibit areas. The gorilla expert works with another keeper who is an expert with reptiles, first observing him feed the python, then practicing on her own. She shares with her colleague that she is a bit nervous about this new challenge, as it is outside her area of expertise. He reassures her and coaches her, offering feedback and helpful tips as she learns the process. After successfully feeding the python, she says that she has gained confidence and will add snakes to the list of animals she is comfortable working with.

> We have a chance to learn and teach that transitions are an important part of life.

Now, let me share more about the sea lions. The story starts with Clyde, a 790-pound sea lion and the breeding male in the pool. To avoid conflict between the males as Franklin and McCabe grow up, the keepers realize that the younger sea lions must be moved to a different zoo. They develop a detailed, intentional plan that involves gradually introducing crates into the animals' environment, using training and fish to make entering the crates a positive experience, and a few weeks later, trucking the sea lions to their new home at the Queens Zoo.

los perezosos (¡no son perezosos en realidad!) o los exóticos rituales de apareamiento de distintas aves o las ingeniosas estrategias que emplean las hienas para cazar su presa. Descubrió la primavera pasada el programa de la tele *The Zoo*, una mirada tras las cámaras en el Zoológico Bronx en Nueva York. Ya soy igual de fanática que mi mamá y sintonizo fielmente cada domingo por la noche.

Aprendo algo nuevo cada vez que veo *The Zoo*. Un episodio de la primera temporada—"Moving Day" (Día de mudanza) realmente me afectó. Tiene tres argumentos: un miembro del personal aprende a darle comida a una pitón; Franklin y McCabe, dos leones marinos jóvenes, tienen que cambiarse a otro zoológico en la Cuidad de Nueva York; y una flamenca llamada Dinky requiere cirugía.

La parte del episodio dedicada a la pitón sigue una cuidadora, experta en gorilas, mientras aprende a darle de comer a una enorme pitón africana de roca. El Zoológico Bronx exhibe especies que se hallarían juntas naturalmente en estado salvaje—como los gorilas y pitones. Esto significa que el personal debe aprender a proveer un cuidado de la mejor calidad a cada uno de los varios animales en las diversas áreas de exhibición. La experta en gorilas trabaja con un cuidador que es experto en reptiles; primero observa cómo él le da de comer a la pitón y luego lo intenta ella. Comenta a su colega que se siente un poco nerviosa en cuanto a este reto nuevo, ya que queda fuera de su área de pericia. Él le da ánimo y apoyo al ofrecerle comentarios y consejos útiles mientras aprende ella el proceso. Después de alimentar a la pitón con éxito, dice ella que ha ganado confianza y que agregará las serpientes a la lista de animales con que trabaja a gusto.

Ahora déjeme hablar más de los leones marinos. La trama comienza con Clyde, un león marino de 790 libras (357 kilos) y el macho de cría en el estanque. A fin de evitar conflictos entre los tres machos conforme se van madurando Franklin y McCabe, los cuidadores se dan cuenta de que estos dos jóvenes deben ser cambiados a otro zoológico. Desarrollan un plan detallado e intencional que incluye introducir jaulas poco a poco en el ambiente de los animales, usar entrenamiento y pescado para que meterse a las jaulas sea una experiencia positiva y, unas semanas más tarde, transportar los leones marinos por camión a su hogar nuevo en el Zoológico Queens.

The keepers work together throughout the process; they talk about how important it is that they remain calm and on the same page, so they can keep everything normal for the transfer. They don't want to add to the sea lions' stress.

When moving day arrives, everything works just as they planned. The keepers successfully get Franklin and McCabe into the truck (it is air conditioned and has a water pump, in case they get stuck in New York City traffic), unload the sea lions at the Queens Zoo, and cheer them on as they swim away. Franklin is a bit hesitant at first. It takes some time, but eventually he adjusts to his new home. The keepers are there every step of the way, providing support, care, and encouragement. One of the keepers says of the sea lions' moving, "They were born here, they were raised here, we taught them their first behaviors; but it's time for them to move on to where they are going to become adults. And that's always bittersweet."

Do these stories sound familiar?

As I watched this episode, I could not help but think about all the transitions that happen for children, families, and educators each September, and the many opportunities we have to provide support for them and for each other. I can remember welcoming a new class of preschool children into my classroom. I worked at a full-year program, so the last Friday in August was the last day of the summer program, and the day after Labor Day the new school year started. There were new names on the cubbies and books about fall in the reading corner.

Los cuidadores colaboran durante todo el proceso. Hablan de la importancia de quedarse calmados y en la misma página para mantener la normalidad de todo para la transferencia. No quieren contribuir al estrés de los leones marinos.

El día de la mudanza, todo va justo como habían planeado. Los cuidadores meten a Franklin y McCabe en el camión con éxito (tiene aire acondicionado y una bomba de agua en caso de que se atasquen en el tráfico de la Ciudad de Nueva York), descargan los leones marinos en el Zoológico Queens y los animan cuando se alejan nadando.

Franklin está algo vacilante al principio. Tarda algo, pero con tiempo se ajusta a su hogar nuevo. Los cuidadores están allí en cada paso del camino, y proveen apoyo, cuidado y ánimo. Uno de ellos dice de la mudanza de los leones marinos: "Nacieron aquí, se criaron aquí y les enseñamos sus primeros comportamientos; pero ya les toca ir adonde se harán adultos. Y eso siempre es agridulce".

¿Le parecen familiares estas historias?

Mientras miraba este episodio, no podía más que pensar en todas las transiciones que hacen los niños, las familias y los educadores cada septiembre, y las muchas oportunidades que tenemos de proveer apoyo para ellos y para nosotros, uno al otro. Puedo recordar darle la bienvenida a una nueva clase de niños preescolares en mi aula. Trabajaba en un programa de año completo, así que el último viernes de agosto era el

There was much excitement and some anxiety for everyone as we settled in together. We all had to learn new rules and make new friends, and we educators had to start to assess how we would individualize instruction and support each child's learning and development along the way.

Transitions can be a stressful time—for animals and for people. Watching "Moving Day" reminded me how critical it is that we support and learn from our colleagues, that we be intentional in our planning, that we have patience during the process, and that we use kindness, teamwork, and understanding. There will be bumps along the way, and everything may not go as planned, but we have a chance both to learn and to teach that transitions and change are an important and necessary part of life.

You will have to watch the show yourself to learn more about Dinky, the flamingo. Let me just say that her story involves successful surgery to repair a ruptured tendon. Support for Dinky's recovery includes a custom-made splint to wear and a special sling to allow her to stand while her leg is healing; an iPad playing sounds from the flamingo exhibit so Dinky won't feel alone while she is separated from her flock; and a keeper gently helping Dinky when she first ventures back into the water.

If you watch "Moving Day," you may be struck, as I was, by how zookeepers' and educators' practices sometimes have much in common.

- For NAEYC resources to help with transitions of all kinds, visit **NAEYC.org/resources/topics/routines-and-transitions**.
- To watch "Moving Day," go to **https://bit.ly/2HLfq7e**.

último día del programa de verano y el nuevo año escolar empezaba el día después de Labor Day (Día del Trabajador). Había nuevos nombres en los casilleros y libros sobre el otoño en el rincón de lectura.

Había mucho entusiasmo y algo de ansiedad entre todos mientras nos acomodamos juntos. Todos teníamos que aprender reglas nuevas y hacer amigos nuevos, y los educadores teníamos que empezar a evaluar cómo individualizar la instrucción y apoyar el aprendizaje y el desarrollo de cada niño sobre la marcha.

Las transiciones pueden ser estresantes, tanto para los animales como para la gente. El episodio "Moving Day" me recordó de lo esencial que es apoyar a nuestros colegas y aprender de ellos, planear con intención, tener paciencia durante el proceso y actuar con bondad, colaboración y comprensión. Habrá topes en el camino y es posible que no todo vaya como planeamos, pero tenemos una oportunidad de tanto aprender como enseñar que las transiciones y los cambios son factores importantes y necesarios de la vida.

Tendrá que ver el programa usted mismo para aprender más sobre la flamenca Dinky. Sólo diré que su historia es de una cirugía exitosa para repararle un tendón con ruptura. El apoyo para la recuperación de Dinky incluye una tablilla hecha a medida para llevar puesto y un levantador especial que le permite ponerse de pie mientras se cura la pierna; un iPad que toca sonidos de la exhibición de flamencos para que Dinky no se sienta sola durante su tiempo separada de su bandada; y un cuidador que ayuda con cariño a Dinky cuando vuelve por primera vez al agua.

Si ven "Moving Day", es posible que les afecte como me afectó a mí lo mucho que a veces tienen en común las prácticas de los cuidadores zoológicos y las de los educadores.

- Para recursos de NAEYC que ayudan con transiciones de todo tipo, visite **NAEYC.org/resources/topics/routines-and-transitions**.
- Para ver "Moving Day," vaya a **https://bit.ly/2HLfq7e**.

NAEYC Is Committed to Increasing Equity

Creating equitable learning opportunities for all young children is at the core of NAEYC's mission. Based on high-quality research and our values, we are committed to recognizing and building on each child's individual and family strengths, cultural background, home language, abilities, and experiences.

We're working with the field

Drawing on our three decades of promoting and supporting anti-bias education, NAEYC—and most importantly, thousands of NAEYC members—developed a new position statement, "Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education," which is now being endorsed by education organizations across the country. It combines a strong research foundation with ambitious recommendations for educators, administrators, professors, and policymakers. The heart of these recommendations is captured in the bold call to action that opens the statement:

> All children have the right to equitable learning opportunities that help them achieve their full potential as engaged learners and valued members of society. Thus, all early childhood educators have a professional obligation to advance equity. They can do this best when they are effectively supported by the early learning settings in which they work and when they and their wider communities embrace diversity and full inclusion as strengths, uphold fundamental principles of fairness and justice, and work to eliminate structural inequities that limit equitable learning opportunities.

And working within NAEYC

For NAEYC to be a leader in equity, we have to—and want to—live our values. We believe that the early education profession should reflect the great diversity (racial, cultural, linguistic, and more) of the children and families served. We believe NAEYC's membership should not only reflect but include the full early childhood field. And we believe that NAEYC must strive to continuously improve as a high-performing, inclusive organization.

NAEYC took a big step forward in this work through a three-day summit that brought together our entire national governing board and many leaders from our affiliates, interest forums, advisory councils, and staff. Participants dove into deep, systemic problems:

> I stood at the Lincoln Memorial yesterday, in the spot Martin Luther King stood to deliver his "I Have a Dream" speech, and had tears in my eyes as I thought, "How can we still be here? Why haven't we made more progress?"

In doing so, they found a renewed commitment to the promise of early childhood education:

> I have a new understanding of equity and a better appreciation of belonging. I really like the "know your *why*" so that your *what* has more purpose.

"I realized that I've never known how I might impact someone—for good or for bad—unintentionally. This is an important discussion, and I plan to bring some of it back to my organization. I hope I will be brave enough to continue to have these discussions with the people around me." —Summit participant

For these resources—and many more—on advancing equity, visit **NAEYC.org/equity**. You'll find links to inspiring articles from *Young Children* and *Teaching Young Children* that highlight how dedicated, intentional educators are creating equitable learning opportunities and maximizing children's learning.

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NAEYC **Member Spotlight**

Tessie Ragan

Family Child Care Provider
Edwards Air Force Base, California

Tessie Ragan comes from a long line of educators. Her mother was a military family child care provider, and her grandmother taught public elementary school in Queens, New York. So for Tessie, the inspiration to teach came naturally—and early. "When I was 5 years old, I decided that I wanted to join the military and to be a teacher when I retired," she remembers.

And that's exactly what Tessie did. A four-year veteran of the US Air Force, she has been working in early childhood education since leaving the military in 2005. While pursuing her degree (and moving frequently with her military family), she held "a multitude of jobs" in the field, serving as a teacher's aide for a child with Down syndrome, as a Kindermusik teacher, and as a tutor. She eventually landed in the role that continues to feel most like home: working as a family child care and education provider, first in Germany (where her Air Force husband was stationed) and now in the United States.

Tessie's interest in family child care was sparked by a discovery early in her studies. "I found that there was a gap," she says. "Parents had to pick between high-quality care and affordable care. And usually the children whose parents had to pick affordable care, . . . they were the kids who were constantly behind, no matter what. I felt like I could be one of those people that filled that gap."

After returning from Germany and completing her bachelor's degree in birth through kindergarten education from Western Carolina University in 2012, Tessie initially opened a family child care and education business in Maryland. Currently, she runs a preschool/pre-K program from her home on Edwards Air Force Base, in the high desert in Southern California. She relishes the opportunity home-based care gives her to build deep relationships with children in a smaller setting. "With a big center, there can be a lot of turnover. Sometimes the parents don't get to know the provider or teacher as well because the teacher has moved on," Tessie says. "But I have these kids for two or three years, and they stay with me the whole time. They have more stability."

As Tessie well knows, family child care and education is not without its challenges. It can be hard to find balance when your work involves bringing children into your home. Tessie closed her first home-based program in Germany when her husband deployed because she knew she wouldn't be able to provide the high-quality learning environment the children deserved while also making sure her own children's needs were met. "You need to make sure there's space in your home for your family, and you need to make sure that you are building in enough time so that you don't get burned out trying to be everything for your clients," she shares.

Tessie also acknowledges that she has to work harder to be respected by those who think of family care providers as "babysitters." She often has to explain her qualifications and work to skeptical parents. But Tessie takes inspiration from knowing that she is working every day to accomplish her vision. "I was able to create a program that parents could afford where the children are actually more than ready for kindergarten. They love learning, and they love science and engineering, and they love reading. I am super proud."

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SHARE YOUR STORY Answer a few questions to tell us about your work with young children and what NAEYC membership means to you.

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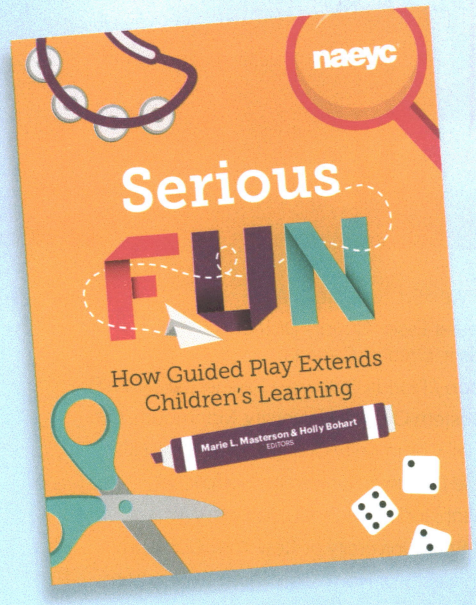

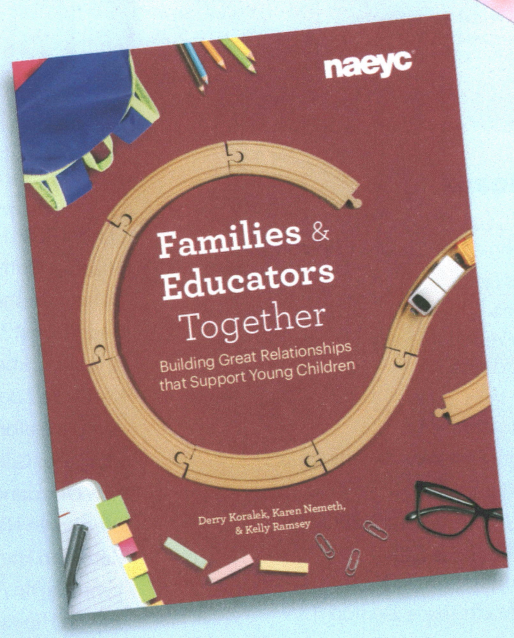

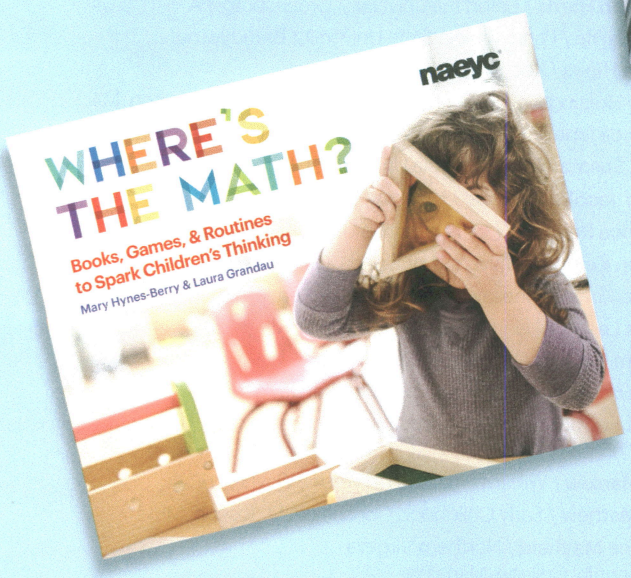

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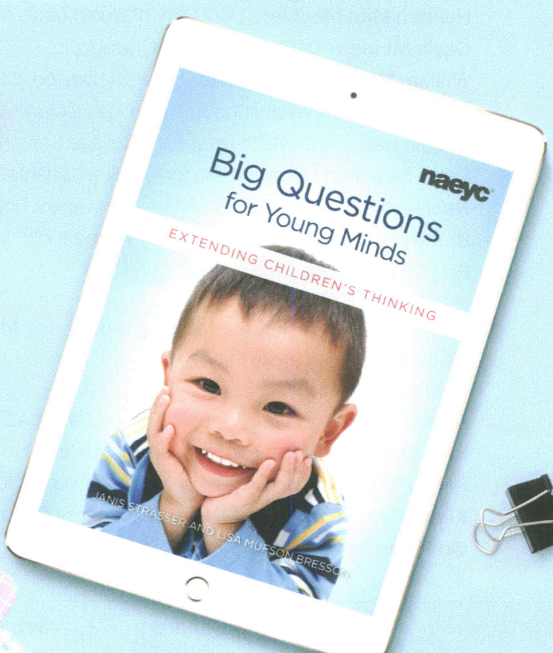

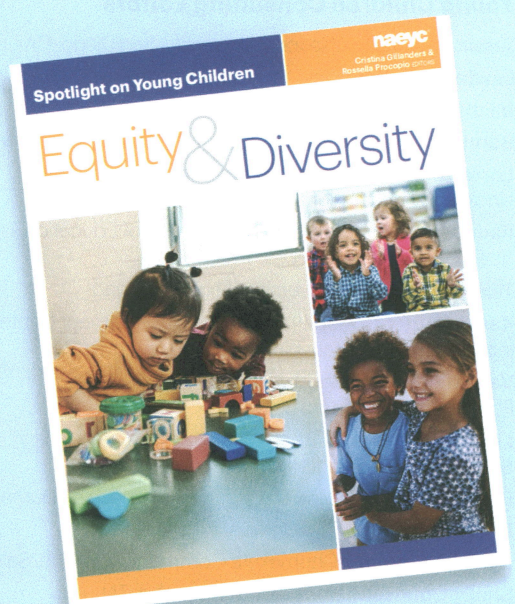

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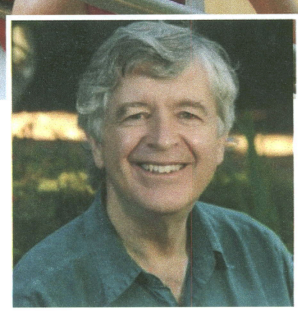
Two's Company, Three's a Crowd

Peer Interactions in a Preschool Social Triangle

Christopher Robert Taaffe

Lisa is the last of three girls bobbing across the yard, playing follow the leader on yellow Hoppity-Hops. "Wait for me, guys! Play with me, guys!" she begs. Ellen and Gretchen don't stop or look back. Other children peer up anxiously as Lisa, in tears, wails plaintively, "You guys have to play with me. Play with me, guys." The other two bounce on, ignoring her. Lisa notices me watching and cries out, "I want them to play with me and they won't. They won't!" My answer is naïve, unaware: "But you are—you're hopping right with them!" Her face is a mask of misery and panic. "No, they won't play with me!" But a short while later it is Gretchen who is hurtling herself face down onto the sand, tears streaming, wailing that Lisa won't play with her. Lisa is now running happily with Ellen.



Christopher Robert Taaffe, MA, teaches preschool in Berkeley, California. He has served as site supervisor and as acting director for two other preschools in the Bay Area. Chris also provides care for children of homeless migrants and asylum-seekers with Al Otro Lado, in Tijuana, Mexico.
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Thoughts on the Article | Barbara Henderson, *Voices* Executive Editor

Even long-time teachers like Christopher Taaffe often struggle to deal productively with children's social conflict. This study explores how even very young children form intense social bonds with peers, and how complex their social interactions can be. A real strength of this study is how it reveals the social competence of children who have just turned 3—competence attained far earlier than traditional developmental theories would suggest. Taaffe becomes increasingly aware of the reason and need behind the children's behavior and uses his insider status as their teacher to make changes to the curriculum to serve them and the class as a whole.

The study's findings are strongly linked with the broader literature, demonstrating how teacher research can add significantly to the educational knowledge base. In fact, there are few naturalistic studies of triad relationships with children this young. Taaffe has a sharp eye for observing children in their element. His observations capture the girls as they talk amongst themselves and in their interactions with teachers. Peer-to-peer conversations are some of the most telling evidence showing how much of what looks like simple social aggression is actually a workshop for children's thinking about how to get along.

> A few days later, Gretchen and Ellen are in the block area happily using tools. As Ellen watches, Lisa moves in and tries to grab a toy shovel from Gretchen, who resists and pulls back. Lisa retorts, "Let's go play somewhere else, Ellen!" Ellen replies brightly, "Yes! Let's go play in the playhouse [dramatic play area]," and they leave. Gretchen is bereft, sobbing.

Ellen, Gretchen, and Lisa, not yet 3, were locked for many weeks in a social triangle, wrenched by escalating clashes over who got to play with whom at any given time. Like other young preschool girls, each one strongly preferred to play in a dyad (Benenson 1993). As all three initially refused to play with any other children, one of the girls was always left out. The excluded child would invariably throw a tantrum, screaming at and sometimes even physically attacking the other two. Even more upsetting, the trio rearranged their pairings several times an hour. Each shift would result in tears, shouts, frustration, and anger. This deeply stressed the girls, interrupted their play time, and sharply disturbed the other children's activities. As scenes such as those unfolded, I asked myself: What micro-events, what confluence of factors, causes these abrupt re-pairings? If I could answer that, I might be able to help ease them past their conflicts less painfully.

As a veteran early childhood educator, I don't expect a conflict-free classroom. But these were not the typical toddler disputes. They were similar to the pitched emotional battles over friendships and play partners often seen in older children (Underwood 2003). Oddly, too, this was the second year in a row my class included a very contentious play triangle. The previous time it had been three boys, so gender didn't seem to be a factor. The children's harsh strife, deep anguish at being excluded, and disruption of other children's play all greatly troubled me. This led me to the questions at the heart of my teacher research: How could my coteachers and I figure out what was going on in the girls' interactions? What could we do to help these children manage their relationships? My initial *impulse* was to somehow understand the source of these painful incidents, mainly so we might anticipate and prevent them.

Review of literature

A large body of literature describes typical child development and the evolving cognitive and affective capabilities that underlie

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young children's growing social competence. Much research describes the typical maturation of emotion, empathy, thinking, and language involved in play among 2s and 3s (Brownell & Kopp 2007). However, practical help for educators regarding classroom management strategies, and teachers' roles in scaffolding positive peer interactions with older toddlers, is limited within early childhood research. Its inquiries usually focus on correlates and effects of behavior. A few studies describe teacher strategies to help less-skilled children enter play with available partners (Hazen & Black 1984; Bullock 1988; Fox & Lentini 2006; Gillespie & Hunter 2010), although this wasn't quite the situation we faced. The same was true of other studies that examine how children interact in short-lived, three-way child encounters in the laboratory (McLloyd et al. 1984; Ishikawa & Hay 2006). However, I could find no naturalistic or clinical research about young preschoolers involved in exclusive, persistent, and highly conflicting groups of three.

Peer-culture studies helped me better understand the trio's tumultuous encounters (Kantor et al. 1993; Corsaro 2003; Neimark 2012). As I read this work I began to see that children's exclusions and rejections were not necessarily cruel or even artless. The central tenet of such studies is that children are social agents, shaping their relational networks and seeking to control their social worlds outside of adult agendas. The peer culture literature reminds teachers to focus on the child's point of view, on how any given behavior is meant to serve her goals of creating knowledge or connection (Avgitidou 2001). In this view, when children hoard certain toys, dominate certain spaces at school, invent private language or rituals, speak harshly to each other, or exclude each other (all behavior that Ellen, Lisa, and Gretchen used regularly), these interactions serve as little workshops in which they gradually forge satisfying processes of play and companionship.

My preconceptions about children's conflicts had diminished my teaching success.

Older toddlers, more aware of the delights of shared play and gradually moving into more collaborative play, are just learning the complicated skills of keeping these play connections going. Their play with other children may feel so fragile and precarious to them (Corsaro 2003) that they act to protect it with exclusionary behavior or verbal aggression. Such acts may not be the evidence of selfishness, defiance, or even antisocial impulses that many adults tend to assume. As I started this study, the intensity of the triad's conflicts, and their appearance so early in preschool, tended to make me wonder if the girls' hurtful behavior resulted from emotional disequilibrium or even aggressive traits.

The constructivist view of child development says that children actively assemble knowledge and meaning, rather than just imitating others or passively receiving understandings. Piaget (1966) saw this process of cognitive growth as a mainly internal, solitary process, with only peripheral attention to the role of play with others. Vygotsky (1978), in contrast, described such learning as occurring mainly in social contexts, during moments of close collaboration in shared activities. The notion that children develop an ability to see that other people have feelings or understandings different than their own is called the "theory of mind." This ability is key to collaborative learning. How were the three girls learning from each other's reactions in these situations, and what were they learning?

The sociocultural perspective of Rogoff and others provides another frame for this teacher research. The customary practices, values, and language of a society shape its children's encounters with each other. Children's behavior mirrors cultural norms of emotional expression, friendship,

community, status, conflict, and property (Rogoff 2003). Culture and economic class also mold the teaching methods and child behavior that early childhood teachers consider appropriate (Tobin et al. 2011). For instance, in Japanese culture, preschool teachers permit other children to tease or exclude certain girls so as to evoke their amae, or culturally valuable feeling of loneliness, and sudan shugi, or social mindedness (Hayashi & Tobin 2009). My own cultural model led me to suppress conflicts and "negative" feelings.

My frame of reference

My upbringing provided another frame, teaching me to see the exclusion of others, or the refusal to share, as selfish and egoistic. To nurture children and better our society, I'd always taught children to treat each other gently and avoid excluding others as part of building their sense of community. Prior to this study, in my role as a teacher I uncritically endorsed the "you can't say you can't play" guidelines (Paley 1992; Harrist & Bradley 2003), automatically insisting in each situation that children include all others who wish to join in.

My own teacher training also affected my thinking about conflict between children. Echoing Piaget's theories, it taught me that young children are egoistic thinkers, and therefore, empathetic behavior couldn't develop until later in childhood (Piaget 1966). I learned from this that young children require adult instruction to form positive social attitudes, and that children's clashes were to be minimized as antisocial.

My initial research on the sources of the girls' painful interactions challenged prior assumptions. Looking closely into the causation of the girls' sudden regroupings, exploring what insight they gained and how they gleaned social knowledge, all changed my perspective. I had wanted to see how my colleagues and I could lessen classroom discord and help children manage their relationships. What I didn't know beforehand was that my study would greatly shift how I understood the functions of conflict, which in turn influenced how the children related with each other.

Design of the study

The participants and the setting

My teacher research project included three children and three teachers in the oldest toddler class of a private preschool. I started collecting data halfway through the school year. Lisa, who was sturdy, lively, passionate, and opinionated, was most likely to express negative feelings about the others' behavior, and often tried to direct their play. Ellen, verbal and impish, often negotiated her way back into a dyad by using skills of planning and persuasion. Gretchen was the most outwardly emotional one, most upset by exclusions or frustrations. She needed the most help from teachers to regain her equilibrium. All three loved dancing, chasing, trying new materials at the art table, and playing under the climbing structure or in the dramatic play area.

The children came from intact, two-parent, middle-class families. All were Caucasian, like 76 percent of my students. The 17 children in the class ranged in age from 24 to 34 months when they started in the fall.

This study helped me construct an understanding of how children learn about social connections.

My school is a private nonprofit in a university town with a full-day, play-based program using an emergent curriculum approach and emphasizing social and emotional learning. Our class, housed in a modest-sized room, has many learning materials available on open shelves and an inviting dramatic play area in a roomy alcove three steps up from the main room. We have our own yard, surfaced with sand and lined by foliage, with a redwood tree in the corner, a playhouse, a climbing structure, and a dome. The teachers were Martha, Annie, and myself. Martha and Annie each had more than three years of teaching experience; I have taught for more than 30 years.

Research plan, data collection, and analysis

As the study began, I avoided intervening in the girls' conflicts because I intended to study how they dealt with each other free of my interference. However, I watched to make sure they weren't harming each other, stepping in to guide them only when they became too overwrought to cope. Yet at the same time, from my own experience I knew that very young children also need extra help in relating. As one teacher researcher wrote, "I realize more strongly now the importance of building and guiding friendships for toddlers. I need[ed] to learn the different cues that toddlers use to [communicate to understand when and what kind of intervention might] promote friendship" (Meier & Henderson 2007, 104). As the study progressed, therefore, our teaching team decided to offer more active assistance.

Data collection

In order to answer my questions, over a period of five months I documented the children's interactions with each other throughout the day, recording my interpretations and those of the teachers and parents. I began my research by creating various time charts to log the girls' interactions by the minute and get a clearer view of their social dynamics. This proved unworkable because I had little chance to write many notes and because encounters didn't fit into neat five-minute time slots. I then created a simpler, split-page chart on which I could record the social "moves" that accompanied their re-pairings. My data included transcripts of the girls' conversations, reflections in my journal, a few photos, and the field notes about their interactions. I also used my coteachers' observations, checking my field notes and analyses with them to strengthen accuracy. I spoke about the children's behavior at home with their parents, who described the usual sibling conflicts and the mostly typical behavior of 3-year-olds. I separately interviewed each girl (once in February, once in April) about her likes and dislikes, her playmate preferences, and her feelings about the others.

Analysis methodology

I analyzed my field notes and transcripts and identified anecdotes that illustrated key social behavior and teacher intervention methods. I coded them by date, type of interaction, participants, emotional tone, the resulting dyad after conflict (or cooperation), and the language of inclusion and exclusion they used. I looked for patterns, beginning with the order of the three girls' arrival at school each morning as they arranged their initial dyad formation. I also considered how personality and temperament might be shaping their interactions.

Findings and analysis

This study helped me construct a more detailed understanding of how children learn about social connections and dynamics through their experiments with exclusion, pairing-off, verbal exchanges, and hurt feelings. I was able to see some effects of this new understanding on the children and on my classroom practice. My first finding was that conflict among children is not always negative, requiring adult intervention. This called my previous beliefs into question. The data I collected about these highly interactive conflicts challenged the widely held conclusion that young children are chiefly egoistic, inherently insensitive to each other, and lacking in empathy or social awareness. The three children's

conflicts were real, and often hurtful, which is why initially I saw them primarily from a disapproving adult perspective.

My data reinforced the finding that peer cultures among preschoolers involve a resistive stance toward adult expectations and rules that teachers often mistake as defiant or headstrong (Corsaro 2003). But children creating peer cultures bend adult rules more out of a desire for self-identity and creativity, to mark them as the children's inventions, slightly outside of adult control. The triad's whole pattern of noisy conflict fit this feature of peer cultures. The girls' frequent re-pairings gave each one many chances to violate teacher expectations in a variety of roles.

The children's interpersonal awareness impressed me with its intentionality.

Through analyzing the data, I came to see that deficit-based thinking about children's behavior during conflict only obscures useful insights about such behavior, and thus undermines effective teaching. Instead, I began to understand that these girls exhibited much more sophisticated social skills at this early age than I had thought possible. I was often jolted by the girls' persuasive abilities and their maneuvers to shape their world of play relationships, as in this excerpt.

From Field Notes, February 5:

Ellen and Gretchen are sitting on the toilets together. Gretchen had needed to use the bathroom, and Ellen quickly volunteered to go along. They conversed:

Ellen: (*At once asking and insisting*) We're just gonna play together, Gretchen. (*Gretchen replies inaudibly.*)

Ellen: (*Persisting*) I'm just gonna play with you, right Gretchen? Not Lisa.

Gretchen: (*Evasively*) I'm not playing with Lisa, I'm going to the potty!

Ellen: (*Wheedling*) You're not Lisa's friend, right?

Gretchen: (*Slightly challenging*) Are you Lisa's friend?

Ellen: No, I'm just your friend! (*She changes the subject.*) Is your brother your friend?

The children's display of interpersonal awareness and planning surprised and impressed me with its intricacy and intentionality. I felt that Ellen arranged this chance to be alone with Gretchen (a captive audience) to monopolize her loyalty and seek Gretchen's vow not to play with Lisa. Gretchen at first seemed to evade the issue, but wound up fishing for Ellen's statement of commitment to her ("Are you Lisa's friend?"). Ellen pressed on, telling Gretchen that she was her preferred playmate. Moment by moment, both girls seemed to be assessing the other's words and intonations, intuiting each other's intentions, seeking to modify each other's stance, and adjusting their maneuvers as they engaged in purposeful planning to exclude the third girl.

In looking at the patterns across my data, I found that each girl was aware of her own emotional states and grew more aware of the feelings of the other two. Each deeply felt the pain of exclusion or the triumph of being "chosen." However, even though each girl seemed aware of the grief of being the "odd man out," she nevertheless always chose the privilege to play as a dyad when it was offered—or when she could arrange to get it.

Teacher approaches

As the study progressed, my approach to the children was modified by my enhanced understanding of their exchanges. I came to see that tussling over their alignments allowed them to explore interpersonal power and negotiate social mazes. My early response to the triad conflicts had been automatic rather than thoughtful. Initially, when conflicts occurred I found that my efforts to lecture or to suppress the conflict didn't work, as the following vignette shows.

From Field Notes, March 4:

Gretchen is playing with Mita (an unusual combo!) in the book area. Lisa runs up, taunting, "You can't be our fre-end" in a singsong way, and then scoots away. Gretchen's face dissolves in a flood of tears and sobs. Annoyed, I step in, leading Lisa back over to Gretchen. "Look at Gretchen's face, Lisa," I scolded. "When you say that to her, it hurts her. That's why she's crying. It's not OK to hurt our friends. What could you say to Gretchen that might help her feel a bit better?" Lisa's face crumpled as she began to sob.

We teachers conferred privately to find more effective responses. As adults we couldn't "make over" their play arrangements, much less guarantee their tranquility. Instead, to model gentler language and sociable behavior, we set out to role-play some different ways to interact. On four occasions my coteacher Martha staged short plays for all the children at story time (using puppets) in which the characters excluded each other and acted upset. Then she asked the class to suggest other ways the characters could speak to each other. She helped the children develop some new responses, such as "You can play with us later!" instead of "You can't play with us!" Martha then reenacted the scene using these new phrases, which yielded happier outcomes for the puppets.

From Field Notes, March 18:

Ten days after the second similar "puppet show," I overheard new dialogue: Lisa and Ellen approached Gretchen at the art table, chanting, "You have to be the monster, Gretchen!" "I'm not the monster!" she said, refusing to play. I expected Lisa to argue, but she replied cheerfully, "OK. We'll play with you later." The next day Lisa was loudly excluding a tearful Ellen. To end this, I began to call Lisa's name. I hadn't made more than the initial Lee- sound when she turned on a dime, as if expecting this. In a singsong voice, eyeing me, she chirped, "You can play with me later, Ellen!"

At the moment, I was surprised at how quickly the adult modeling from our puppet role-play had influenced her. On reflection, I wondered if the interaction had been her bid for adult attention rather than a measure of our modeling success.

Suggesting other playmates

By February 20, we'd seen the girls occasionally try playing with girls outside of the triad. A few days later, I noted first Gretchen, then Lisa, become engaged with Natasha. After spring break we teachers started a new strategy. One day when the other two noisily excluded Gretchen, I waited a bit, and then murmured to her that Charlene might like to play. They clicked! I was surprised, since the trio had seemed so ingrown and the newer playmates were developmentally younger. I noticed, however, that the alternate playmates got abandoned in a flash whenever a triad member became available for play. These ventures into wider play choices prompted us to urge the girls' parents to set up playdates with various children outside the triad.

Broadening choices with "friendly" speech

Despite the play with new friends, the three girls kept up their taunting language toward each other. So in mid-March, we teachers invented a game called "Friendly Words" to foster kindness in social speech (Doescher & Sugarawa 1992). Since tone conveys meaning, the teachers took turns uttering common phrases in a variety of tones, then asking, "Are those words 'friendly' or 'unfriendly'?" We varied the order of the choices to avoid cuing the children, and we implied no right or wrong answers. We didn't say "nice"/"not nice" because these loaded phrases are commonly used by adults to

evaluate children themselves. We might, for example, say "I don't want to play right now. Maybe later," in a pleasant tone. Some children called that "unfriendly," others "friendly." Some could even explain why they "voted" as they did, revealing their skills in perception, causation, and language. In following days, we also asked children at random moments to rate classroom exchanges that we overheard as "friendly" or "unfriendly." Soon I heard more new snippets of conversation.

From Field Notes, March 30:

Lisa urged, "C'mon, Gretchen, give me a hug," and turned to the teacher: "Hey, Martha, I'm friendly at her!" Later that day, I remarked to Lisa how considerate she had been earlier. She replied happily, "Yes, I'm a friendly girl!"

From Field Notes, April 2:

When Lisa muttered, "Hey, Ellen, let's not play with Gretchen, OK?," I cut in, "Hey, is that unfriendly or friendly?"

Ellen said, "Unfriendly."

"Friendly," Lisa replied impishly, grinning.

Lisa's answer itself might have been in part a performance, another form of the rule-breaking peer culture that expresses children's independence of adult expectations.

Here's an example of how the three girls began to develop more nuanced social skills.

From Field Notes, April 9:

Ellen: (*Arriving at school*) Hey Lisa, do you want to go play?

Lisa: (*Coloring with Charlene*) After I play with Charlene, I'll play with you, Ellen.

Lisa: (*A minute later*) Hey Ellen . . .

Ellen: (*Archly, annoyed*) I'm going to play with you later.

Lisa: Do you have to, Ellen?

Ellen: You hurt my feelings.

Lisa: (*Two minutes later, Lisa yells across the room from the dramatic play center.*) Hey Ellen, you want to take your rain boots off? Get dressed up? (*After a pause, Ellen agrees.*)

In this interaction, the three girls diversified their choices of social discourse. Their exchanges back in January had often seemed angrier, reactive—revealing little ability to wait for the favored playmate or to refocus their attention when disappointed. Earlier in the year, Lisa would never have ignored Ellen to keep playing with Charlene, and Lisa and Ellen wouldn't have discussed their divergent plans so calmly. In this exchange Ellen may have felt angry with Lisa ("I'm going to play with you later"), but her answer to Lisa's regretful protest ("Do you have to, Ellen?") sounded poignant, not angry: "You hurt my feelings." Lisa's response feels like a gentle attempt to reconcile with Ellen. The growing frequency of their consideration and negotiation were not just due to our coaching, of course, but were based also in new choices they were making about relating.

My field notes showed that by mid-April, intense conflicts decreased in frequency as the girls chose gentler interactions. The girls sometimes played with "outsiders," used more friendly tones, and joined in play as a trio for brief periods. Also, I saw times when the "out" girl approached the dyad and the other two would gently redirect her to other play, instead of just taunting or baldly rejecting her.

Another possible finding for the changed behavior is that each of the three grew to care more deeply for the other two. Data from late in the study showed the girls striving at times to meet each other's needs and to avoid mutual harm. On April 7, Gretchen went to sit with Ellen, Lisa, and teacher Martha at the picnic table but began crying that they hadn't left room. Ellen swiftly scooted over to allow Gretchen to sit beside her. Their mutual caring may have come to seem as valuable to each one as the temporary pleasure of having the dyad partner all to herself.

Conclusions and implications

Through my study, I came to understand how my preconceptions about children's conflicts had diminished my teaching success; formerly, I wasn't able to see that my assumptions often obstructed my insight into the girls' actions and motivations.

Each aspect of the girls' increasingly sophisticated social behavior relied on the development of cognitive and affective abilities. The ability to recognize and react to others' feelings rested on growing awareness that others have similar emotions that can be influenced. This growth allowed

them to be more compassionate. The awareness of others as distinct from oneself, each with a subjective mental state, made persuasion and negotiation more practicable. Greater language skills enabled them to influence others and let their play become more complex. Maturing abilities in self-monitoring and self-regulation allowed them to better control their impulsive, hurtful behavior and to adjust it when they found changed circumstances. It's likely that their conflicted sparring helped them develop these capabilities.

Although less frequent and intense as the spring wore on, the trio's emotional struggles with each other persisted. Children act to achieve goals, even if not consciously. The three of them achieved something by enacting these painful conflicts. Since children learn about themselves by encountering others, the skirmishes likely served to build crucial interpersonal knowledge—revealing how each girl felt, paired off, recombined, and made up. Conflicts are also chances to assert individuality, measure the strength of individual wishes, and compare divergent interests. The girls' dramas of exclusion, abandonment, and ecstatic re-inclusion may have served as a kind of risky ritual that served to define their social network, control its territory, and test its durability.

This study had the main effect of changing my thinking about peer interactions of all kinds, which improved both my thinking and my practice. My early response to the triad's conflict focused on prevention; it was formulaic rather than thoughtful. With good intent, I sought to ease conflict by pressing for my adult notion of prosocial play—"enforced togetherness." Like many teachers, I had assumed that conflict arises mainly from deficit: immaturity, or worse, antisocial impulses. Admonishing the girls to meet adult standards of behavior didn't work. However, when I studied the intricate and intentional ways they interacted, I learned to see their actions as experimental efforts to carry out social and emotional goals.

We teachers began to provide more positive choices of prosocial action. We modeled examples of more engaging language. Via discussions about other children's experiences and mental states, we equipped children to better perceive and identify each other's feelings. Throughout, we respected children as architects of their own relationships: "Allowing children more space to develop their own authentic ways to interact can be more effective in strengthening collaborative play and building their social competence with peers" (Neimark 2012, 64). When we reinforced and supported the capabilities underlying prosocial relations, the girls could better choose to adjust their own behavior to the benefit of all three.

We must find ways to teach within and from conflict instead of suppressing it.

Play-based programs with a social development emphasis could benefit from trying similar strategies, as could any other kind of early childhood program. Other early childhood practitioners may experience conflict and injury far more challenging than our conflicted play triangle. Conflict is part of life. We must find ways to teach within and from conflict instead of just suppressing it. We should capitalize on children's innate empathy and sensitivity, instead of acceding to the basically antisocial notion that humans are controlled by self-centered impulses. If we give children opportunities to build their strengths, we can reinforce their ability to get along with others throughout their schooling and lives and make a contribution to a more just and humane society in the process.

This article was originally published by NAEYC in *Our Inquiry, Our Practice: Undertaking, Supporting, and Learning from Early Childhood Teacher Research(ers)* (2012), edited by Gail Perry, Barbara Henderson, and Daniel R. Meier. In this collection, readers will find additional teacher research studies as well as articles on supporting early childhood teacher researchers in the classroom.

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The references are included in a longer version of this article that is available at **NAEYC.org/resources/pubs/vop**.

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Afterword: Three's a Crowd, But Children Can Crowdsource Conflicts and Gain Social Learning

It's not uncommon for preschool teachers to react reflexively to children's interpersonal conflicts, seeing them as disruptions at best or misbehavior at worst, and then trying to head off or suppress them. That was my pattern as I began this research nine years ago. The frames of teacher research, my study, and the insights of constructivism together started me thinking about what peer conflicts represent and how we can seize on them as learning moments.

Since my study, more researchers have published about the functions of peer clashes. One group of researchers concluded that "interpersonal conflicts serve important purposes in that they facilitate child[ren] to become conscious of their own emotions (to regulate and control their emotions), to understand mental states of others, and to elaborate problem-solving strategies" (Jensen de Lopez et al. 2012, 28). Conflict patterns paradoxically reduce children's uncertainty about the behavior of others (Daniel et al. 2016) and help fine-tune friendships. As such, negative interactions are "important, if not necessary, contributors to cognitive, moral and social development" (Ashby & Neilsen-Hewett 2012, 146).

Also since my study, I have moved to a smaller school that has a better coverage ratio (offering more time to spend with each child) and that rejects defining any child by a "deficit model." The director, keenly attentive to supporting child interactions (as I'd thought I was!), mentored me on how to go still deeper with children after such clashes, helping them mine and assimilate the knowledge of self and others hidden within the encounter. All this has let me put my teacher research learning to greater use. I link it to the patient, child-centered, constructivist, and compassionate scaffolding that my director models.

When a conflict occurs, we must first prevent children from doing harm. Then, I'm finding that our best role is to help children glean the most learning possible from that conflict, while avoiding our own judgment or disapproval. We balance two goals: first, to guide the participants to reach a resolution (restoring classroom peace!) and second—just as important—to listen patiently to help children understand (and construct schema) about

- Why they each behaved the way they did
- How the other felt
- What needs each sought to meet
- How to navigate the landscapes of intention, emotion, and personality
- What steps each might try next time (all in an age-appropriate way)

This kind of heightened self- and social-awareness in the early years is related to prosocial behavior later in life (Ashby & Neilsen-Hewett 2012)—which means that in preschool we can prepare children to become citizens more equipped to know themselves, to attend to the needs and feelings of others, and to resolve conflicts without violence.

Building Resilience

Helping Children Cope with Violence in Their Communities

Jennifer R.M. Hill and Regina M. Adesanya

Ms. Joan and Ms. Maria have just finished settling the preschoolers for their afternoon naps when they hear a loud pop from outside. As the teachers glance out the window to see what's going on, twin brothers Jamil and Kamil begin trembling and crying out, "No police, no police! Don't shoot!" Ms. Joan and Ms. Maria move the twins to another room, reassuring them that the noise was only a car backfiring as it passed by.

A few weeks later, Florencia rushes over to Ms. Maria as soon as she arrives, full of news: "Ms. Maria, last night the gangs were fighting and shooting outside my window. I was so afraid! My mommy and me slept on the floor away from the window," she says. Ms. Maria is shocked but manages to say, "Well, I'm so glad you are here!" Florencia adds, "They still fighting. I don't want to go outside to play today. It's not safe."

Early childhood educators do their best to create nurturing environments where children feel safe and enjoy the many benefits of playful learning. They pursue children's interests, partner with families, bring children's cultures into their curricula, document learning—and so much more. Unfortunately, teachers who work in severely under-resourced communities often face additional challenges. Far too many children live in unsafe neighborhoods, and their teachers must be prepared to help them address their fears and concerns.

Much of the research related to young people's experiences with community violence has concentrated on adolescents, with far less research focused on children between infancy and age 8. But available data indicate that young children are increasingly exposed to violence and other adverse experiences in their homes and neighborhoods (Berkowitz 2003; Finkelhor et al. 2015; Jiménez et al. 2016). Not surprisingly, children (and teachers) who feel unsafe in the school environment may experience anxiety and depression that impede school performance (Juvonen & Graham 2001; McCoy, Raver, & Sharkey 2015; Ungar 2015). Studies have also shown that "exposure to community violence is a

major risk factor for the development of emotional and behavioral problems among young people" (Aisenberg & Herrenkohl 2008, 297).

Exposure to extreme violence can cause significant stress that compromises or distorts children's emotional and intellectual development. Children who have experienced trauma due to violence in their neighborhoods, like Jamil, Kamil, and Florencia, may be reminded of the trauma they suffered by a variety of seemingly innocuous triggers, including sounds, sights, and even smells. They may be very sensitive to perceived threats, even in safe situations, and have difficulty calming down; and some children may be constantly on alert—in a state of hyperarousal (Statman-Weil 2015). In addition to these more immediately visible effects, children who grow up in neighborhoods plagued by gun violence may experience a succession of detrimental effects on education, health, and family life (Reeves & Holmes 2015).

Early childhood educators can't solve the problem of community violence, but they can reduce its impact by helping to build children's resilience. Resilience theory suggests that some protective factors can enable individuals and groups to adapt positively even in situations that involve great risk or persistent adversity, such as growing up in an under-resourced, high-crime neighborhood (Jain & Cohen 2013; Ungar 2015). Social support from a child's family, community, and school is vital (O'Donnell, Schwab-Stone, & Muyeed 2002). But because parents are often traumatized by the violence in their neighborhoods, just like their children are, community violence may reduce families' abilities to offer their children social and emotional protection. Ideally, in situations like these, the school community can become a safe haven, providing the support children and families need.

Early childhood educators can reduce the impact of community violence by helping to build children's resilience.

It is essential to recognize and support children who are affected by toxic environments as early as possible (Bowman, Comer, & Johns 2018). Understanding teachers, warm and consistent caregivers, supportive friends and neighbors, and experienced family counselors can play a significant role in reducing children's stress and improving long-term outcomes (see "Useful Online Resources for Teachers and Families" on p. 91).

Supporting children in the classroom

Many educators encounter children who have experienced trauma of some kind in their classrooms; in many cases, they work with children who are exposed to distressing situations on a daily basis. The good news is that teachers already do many things that can help buffer the impact of these traumatic situations and mitigate children's distress: support children and their families, create a sense of physical safety in the classroom, teach children how to regulate feelings, nurture children's emotions, pay attention to their unique triggers, offer empathy and support, allow children to express their emotions, and use positive guidance to help all children, both in and out of the classroom. These strategies are important and depend on educators developing strong relationships with children and their families; but because the strategies are also widely used, we would like to turn our attention in this article to some lesser known helpful approaches. Here, we urge teachers to reduce the impact of community violence on children's development by becoming self-reflective, creating culturally rich classrooms, and using literature to foster empathy and teach conflict resolution skills.

Self-reflective teachers

Before developing new supports for children and families who are impacted by community violence, it's helpful to take time to reflect on one's feelings, beliefs, and practices. Although self-reflection can be uncomfortable, teachers benefit from acknowledging what they do not know and accepting that they—like everyone—have biases, though they may not be aware of them (Derman-Sparks & Edwards 2010). This is an important first step toward identifying what educators can do in their classrooms to reduce the impact of community violence and build children's resilience.

The following questions are intended to enable educators to reflect deeply about their feelings about violence, race, ethnicity, resources, children's needs, and families' roles.

- How will talking about community violence affect the children in my class? In what ways will it help them express their concerns? In what ways could it be frightening or upsetting for them?
- In what ways will talking about bias, especially racial and ethnic bias, be helpful to the children in my class? In what ways could it be harmful for them? What can I do to help them understand bias—can I build on children's growing sense of fairness?
- In what ways will having these discussions affect me? What are my own emotional and psychological connections to these issues? What hesitations do I have? What areas do I need to learn more about?

Teachers benefit from acknowledging what they don't know and accepting that they—like everyone—have biases they may not be aware of.

SOS: A Simple Trauma-Informed Strategy for Teachers

By Brian Hutchison

Many children experience trauma related to community violence. Among children ages 2 to 9, 15 to 19 percent witnessed violence in 2014 (Child Trends 2016). Children's responses to trauma are as varied as the experiences themselves, although common reactions include anxiety, sadness, anger, reduced concentration, and decline in school performance (NCTSN 2013).

As an educator of future school counselors, too frequently I see my students mistake children's responses to trauma for behavioral disturbances. When an adult disciplines a child instead of inquiring about potential causes for the behavior, more harm is done to the traumatized child. Our adult patterns of behavior as we respond to trauma must change.

In educational settings, a child's trauma response is likely to occur when the brain is triggered by a reminder of the trauma. A trigger can be as simple as a loud sound or even the smell of a certain food. The brain goes into fight-or-flight mode. In these instances, reasoning with the child is not likely to work, and disciplining the child is likely to be perceived as threatening, making the child's emotional stress and behavior worse.

Instead of resorting to discipline, a teacher can help the child deescalate using the SOS technique:

Stop: Help the child stop escalating by taking deep breaths with you in a purposeful way.

Orient: Help the child orient herself to her surroundings. A common technique is to identify five things the child sees, four things she hears, three things she feels, two things she smells, and one thing she can taste.

Soothe: Help the child self-soothe by playing with a favorite toy, rocking back and forth on a chair, blowing bubbles, or any number of other kinesthetic techniques.

The SOS strategy works best when teachers prepare children in advance so that the children are familiar with the activities involved. All children benefit from learning to take deep breaths. Teachers can make them fun and easy to practice by having children breathe like different animals: they can work their way down from an excited monkey breath to a slow sloth breath. Imagine a classroom of students returning from recess or gym class; they are excited and rambunctious. Now imagine a teacher taking the time each day to practice using deep breaths to calm down while also noting that this is a useful tool for students any time they might wish to relax. This consistent act of priming might help students recognize a familiar active response when a teacher helps them deescalate during a trauma response.

The soothing part of SOS is especially important to determine in advance. Different children find different sensory experiences soothing, so it's worthwhile to spend time getting to know what's most beneficial to each child (or at least to each child who has experienced trauma and is likely to need your support). Imagine taking the time during recess, free play in the classroom, or group based activities to observe students' preferences for soothing. Do they have a favorite fabric they like to wear or rub?

- Do I teach the children ways to identify and calm their emotions, to empathize with other people's emotions, and to resolve conflicts? Do I believe all of the children are capable of learning these skills?
- What role do I think the children's families should play in deciding if and how I address issues related to violence, race, ethnicity, and economic disparities in my classroom? How can I facilitate these conversations with families in a way that makes them feel respected and heard?
- Do I believe in and nurture the hopes and dreams of all of the children in my class equally? What do I do to make sure each child feels valued, respected, and supported?
- Do I see all of the children's families and caregivers as my partners in educating the children? Do I seek to understand each family's strengths?

Culturally rich classrooms

Classroom environments convey strong messages through the arrangement of the space and the selection of images, books, and materials. Children need places where they feel safe and can experience emotional attachment to teachers and other significant adults in their lives. Culturally rich classrooms embrace the diversity of the children and the communities they serve, ensuring that families and community members feel welcome and have many opportunities to engage with educators and with the program. This is critical

Is there a song or saying they like to repeat? Is there a favorite doll, toy, or fidget device that soothes them? The act of heightened observation (and capturing these preferences in a short note to yourself) will likely help you feel more caring and connected to your students as you get to know them at a new level.

The goal when working in a trauma-informed way is to provide safety, predictability, and care in the face of behavior that might be difficult to deal with. A child's trauma response can be violent, with the child hitting others, harming himself, or destroying objects—but the teacher remaining calm and caring is critical to resolving the situation in the short term and building the child's social and emotional skills in the long term. Of course, the physical safety of the child and others is always paramount. Our adult patterns of behavior must change.

Our adult patterns of behavior must change.

For more information, I recommend starting with the free book *The Heart of Learning and Teaching: Compassion, Resiliency, and Academic Success* (Wolpow et al. 2009, available at https://bit.ly/2ZtpQjS). Written by and for educators of K–12 students, this book offers specific, practical strategies for supporting—and maintaining high educational goals for—children who experience trauma. First and foremost, it shares key research that shows teachers can make a difference:

> Traumatic events make it difficult for children to trust. They make it difficult to feel worthy, take initiative, and form relationships. Unconditional positive regard is an important ingredient in recovering from the unspeakable. . . . Students struggling with the trauma don't need another adult to tell them what is wrong with them. What they do need, what helps them thrive, is an adult who treats them with simple sustained kindness, an adult who can empathize with the challenges they face moving between home and school. . . . Studies of children who thrive despite adversity consistently reveal the healing power of an adult who cares. (72)

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About the author

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to forming strong relationships with children and families—and to teaching children how to form positive relationships with others (Amaro-Jiménez 2014).

Culturally rich classrooms bring people together to foster understanding among the children and their families.

To create a culturally rich classroom, teachers may need to deepen their knowledge of the children's cultures, broaden their teaching concepts and approaches, become more cognizant of the experiences of the children and their families, and be sensitive to their own and others' perspectives. The classroom should be a place where diverse cultures are represented and families and community leaders are regularly invited to contribute their knowledge and expertise; in addition, the atmosphere should be one in which children are comfortable to ask questions and engage in discussions. Culturally rich classrooms are communities themselves that bring people together to foster understanding among the children and their families.

Consider taking the following steps to create a culturally rich classroom:

- Be conscious of and reflect on your behaviors; realize that everyone's attitudes and perspectives are influenced by their cultures and experiences. (The self-reflection questions in the previous section are a good place to start.)
- Accept and prepare for the challenges of teaching about violence, racism, and discrimination and their effects; if you're uncomfortable discussing these topics, reflecting on why that might be and additional research and preparation may be helpful. If you have not developed instructional activities on these topics before, review the lesson plans provided by the Anti-Defamation League, which are available for preschool through twelfth grade (www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/lesson-plans).
- Observe children's interactions and document discussions or activities that help you gauge what they already know about violence, bias, and other related topics you would like to help them learn about. Consider how to present the key concepts in terms that they are likely to find accessible. For example, in *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves*, Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards frame their discussions around the concept of *fairness*. Children become aware of human difference and how people are treated as more or less worthy of attention or kindness at a young age; helping children to develop their "budding capacities for empathy and fairness"—and helping them to see the harmful results of unfairness—can enable children to think critically about the world around them and the part they can play in making it more peaceful (Derman-Sparks & Edwards 2010, 5).
- Create opportunities for children to get to know and identify with positive role models in the community, such as health care professionals, librarians, senior citizens, and religious leaders (of several different faiths).
- Create activities that engage children in learning about the diversity represented in the classroom and community. These activities can be designed to increase family engagement in the classroom; for example, you could invite families to share their beloved folktales and foods or to participate in an art project in which everyone paints a picture of where they lived as children.

Finding Local Resources

Community violence and traumatic stress can be overwhelming—and while warm, caring teachers can help, children and their families often need more support than teachers can provide. One of the most helpful things you can do as a teacher is direct families to the professional assistance they need.

- State and county health agencies may be able to help you find organizations in your area that specialize in helping children and families dealing with trauma, like the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut: **www.kidsmentalhealthinfo.com/topics/child-trauma/trauma-focused-services-supports/**
- Organizations like United Way have numerous regional chapters and offer various community support services at low or no cost; 2-1-1, which is largely funded by United Way, is a free telephone service that connects callers to a wide range of local supports, including legal assistance, crisis support, housing assistance, health services, and more. Find out what's available in your area here: **www.unitedway.org/find-your-united-way/**

  www.211.org/
- The Trauma Institute & Child Trauma Institute explains some of the most common and effective forms of psychological treatment and offers a searchable nationwide database of trauma-specific providers: **www.childtrauma.com/treatment/trauma-therapies/**

  www.childtrauma.com/treatment/find-therapist/
- Psychology Today's extensive Find a Therapist database allows users to filter results based on a range of needs, including type of insurance, type of treatment/therapy desired, and languages spoken: **https://bit.ly/2Mspczd**

- Engage children in conversations that relate to issues that affect the community, keeping in mind that the information you share must be developmentally appropriate and that families should be involved when highly sensitive issues are raised (by children or others).
- Be attentive to the needs of children and families; accept that families' concerns may differ from your own, and seek to understand them.
- Teach strategies for problem solving and conflict resolution that help children to express their feelings and experiences and to understand other people's feelings and experiences. To learn more about teaching these social and emotional skills, and to find research-based programs, visit the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (https://casel.org/) and the Committee for Children (www.cfchildren.org/).

Literature that encourages a peaceful classroom

Children are enriched by literature that exposes them to a multitude of ideas and concepts. To support the development of a culturally rich, sensitive, and peaceful classroom, teachers can read and discuss books that highlight how people with different backgrounds and cultures get along with one another. Literature can also engage children in learning about other cultures and places in the world that they may not have the opportunity to visit (which is especially important for children whose families are not able to go on trips or visit museums).

- With carefully chosen books, teachers can also lead children in important discussions, exploring topics like how the characters develop relationships and how they resolve conflicts. Children usually find it easy to relate to characters in stories and can often see issues from different characters' perspectives. When children are unable to do so, teachers can assist them with empathizing with the characters

From the Pages of *Teaching Young Children* **TYC**

Recognizing the Effects of Trauma

Community violence is one of many kinds of traumatic experiences children may face—fires or floods, natural disasters, car accidents, arrest or deportation of a family member, or exposure to tragic events like mass shootings can cause a range of reactions in young children. Sometimes symptoms of stress show up immediately, but they may also be delayed for weeks or months.

The symptoms of trauma can be easily confused with misbehavior—and unlike Florencia, some children may not be able to tell you about what they're feeling. Here are some of the signs to watch out for in your classrooms, and helpful ways you can respond.

- **Fearfulness, clinginess, or unusual separation anxiety or fear of being alone:** Reassure the child that you'll be with him all day. Make sure the class schedule is clearly posted, and refer to it often so he knows what will happen when and where he—and you—will be.
- **Regression to outgrown behaviors like thumb-sucking, unusual issues with toilet training, or reversion to baby talk:** Keep calm and treat the incidents as ordinary; carry on regular conversation while helping the child change her soiled clothes, and respond to baby talk as you would to normal speech. Avoid calling attention to the behavior or shaming the child—these behaviors are coping mechanisms that will disappear as her stress decreases.
- **Recreation of traumatic experiences in play:** Offer the child scenarios in which he has control of what's happening: "Where could the people in the house go so they wouldn't be scared by the gunshots?," "What could you do to keep the cars from getting into an accident?"
- **Increased aggression or acting out:** Acknowledge the child's feelings and help her redirect her energy to a safe place, like a quiet corner, or a more appropriate activity. "It's OK to be mad, but it's not OK to throw things at other people when we're mad. Would you like to throw these bean bags into a box instead?"

This box on children's responses to trauma has been adapted by *YC* editors from Laura J. Colker's article "Being a Helper: Supporting Children to Feel Safe and Secure after Disasters," in the Feb/Mar 2018 issue of *Teaching Young Children*. Read the full article at **NAEYC.org/resources/pubs/tyc/feb2018/being-helper-supporting-children-feel-safe-and-secure-after-disasters**.

and applying lessons from the story to their own behavior. Stories like *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*, written by Judith Viorst, enable a child to acknowledge negative feelings while realizing that things can change. A book like *Have You Filled a Bucket Today? A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids*, written by Carol McCloud, provides children with empathy-building strategies that they can practice daily in the classroom.

Here are additional books that can help children in preschool through third grade learn to control their emotions, express their fears and needs, and build relationships. Teachers may find some of these books appropriate for their whole classes; other books may be best used one-on-one in small groups or with families (depending on individual needs).

Books to help children who have been impacted by trauma or other adverse childhood experiences

- *The Breaking News*, by Sarah Lynne Reul (2018)—After a crisis, a young girl wants to help her community in a big way and starts with one small act of kindness.
- *Far Apart, Close in Heart: Being a Family When a Loved One Is Incarcerated*, by Becky Birtha, illus. by Maya Kastelic (2018)—This book follows several children who struggle with complicated feelings when their parents are incarcerated; it helps adult and child readers learn how to explore these feelings and find hope even in very challenging circumstances.

- *The Kissing Hand (25th Anniversary Edition)*, by Audrey Penn, illus. by Ruth E. Harper and Nancy M. Leak (2018)—Chester Raccoon's mother shares a family secret with him to ease the pain and anxiety of separation.
- *My Daddy's in Jail*, by Anthony Curcio (2015)—With the help of a rhyming cockroach, two bears whose father is in prison learn about his new life and receive the message that they are loved.
- *A Terrible Thing Happened*, by Margaret M. Holmes, illus. by Cary Pillo (2000)—Sherman talks to a counselor who helps him understand his feelings of anxiety and anger after he sees something bad happen.

Reading and discussing books that highlight how different people get along with one another can support the development of a culturally rich, sensitive, and peaceful classroom.

Books to help children control anger and resolve conflict

- *The Day the Crayons Quit*, by Drew Daywalt, illus. by Oliver Jeffers (2013)—Duncan's crayons decide they don't want to color any more. Duncan must listen to them so he can help them resolve their differences.
- *Each Kindness*, by Jacqueline Woodson, illus. by E.B. Lewis (2012)—When a new girl joins their class, Chloe and her friends have an opportunity to learn how a little kindness can make the world a better place.
- *Enemy Pie*, by Derek Munson, illus. by Tara Calahan King (2000)—The narrator doesn't like how new neighbor Jeremy changes the neighborhood, so the narrator's dad suggests they all bake enemy pie together, and they all learn about kindness, respect, courtesy, and friendship.
- *Llama Llama and the Bully Goat*, by Anna Dewdney (2013)—When Llama Llama has trouble with a classmate, he must figure out how to deal with the conflict, giving readers a way to talk about bullying in a non-threatening manner.
- *The Peace Book*, by Todd Parr (2005)—This book offers messages of peace, friendship, and cooperation with colorful images and characters that will engage young readers.

Books to teach cultural awareness and sensitivity

- *Erandi's Braids*, by Antonio Hernández Madrigal, illus. by Tomie dePaola (2001)—Erandi wants a new dress for her birthday, but her mother needs a new fishing net, and Erandi has to decide how much she is willing to sacrifice for her family.
- *The Gold Coin*, by Alma Flor Ada, illus. by Neil Waldman, trans. by Bernice Randall (1991)—Juan is a thief who plans to steal gold from Doña Josefa—along the way, he discovers new things about himself, love, and the human spirit.
- *Smoky Night*, by Eve Bunting, illus. by David Diaz (1994)—When a riot breaks out in Los Angeles, a young boy, his mother, and their cat must leave their apartment and find safety together.

Useful Online Resources for Teachers and Families

"Family Tools"
Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning
http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/family.html

"A Guide to Toxic Stress"
Center on the Developing Child
https://developingchild.harvard.edu/guide/a-guide-to-toxic-stress/

"Resilience Guide for Parents and Teachers"
American Psychological Association
www.apa.org/helpcenter/resilience.aspx

"Self-Regulation Snap Shot #2: Focus on Preschool-Aged Children"
Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services
www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/self-regulation-snap-shot-2-a-focus-on-preschool-aged-children

Conclusion

In his inaugural speech on May 10, 1994, in Pretoria, Nelson Mandela issued a call that all teachers educating children in communities fraught with violence should hear:

> Out of the experience of an extraordinary human disaster that lasted too long, must be born a society of which all humanity will be proud. . . . The time for the healing of the wounds has come. The moment to bridge the chasms that divide us has come. The time to build is upon us.

Although educators cannot shield children from violence in their communities, they can play a crucial role in minimizing its impact. By developing meaningful relationships with children, children's families, and community members, teachers can help heal emotional wounds and build children's resilience.

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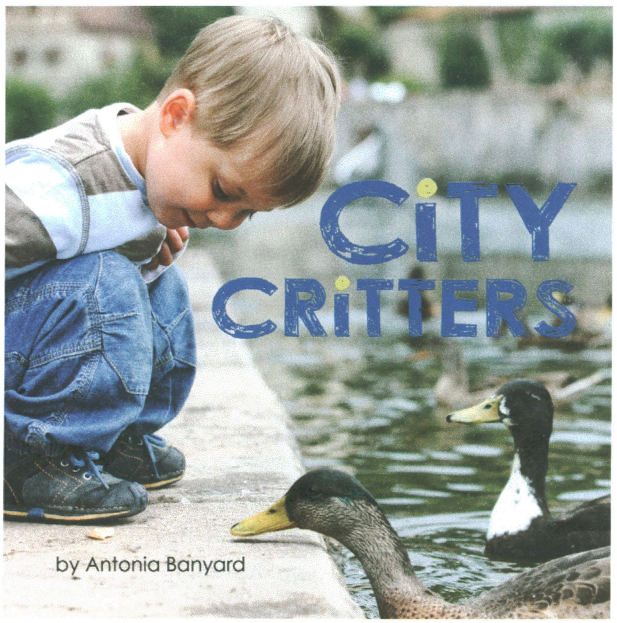
The Reading Chair

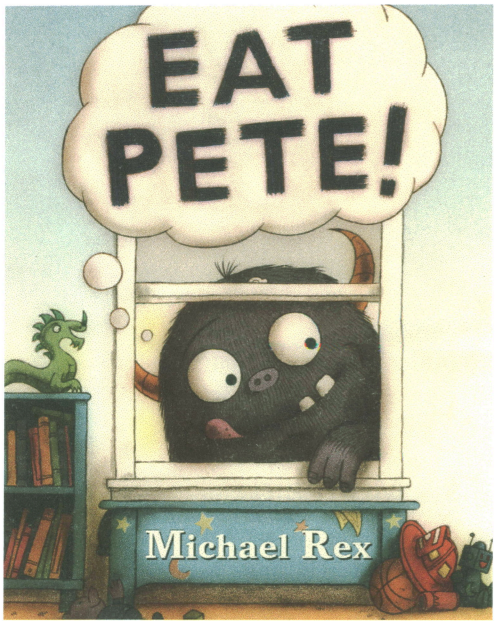
New children's books too good to miss and one forever favorite



City Critters

By Antonia Banyard. 2018. Toronto: Annick Press. 18 pp. Ages birth to 2.

This board book invites young children to step outside and explore city life in the fresh air. How good it feels! Vibrant, high-quality photographs show curious child explorers of various racial backgrounds as they investigate the animals that live in the parks and plazas of their urban surroundings: a squirrel, pigeons, a rabbit, a frog, and a duck. The text prompts readers to be inquisitive about what they see, hear, and find along the way. The book hits many notes (multiculturalism, nature, animals, vocabulary) while remaining simple and accessible.



Eat Pete!

By Michael Rex. 2018. New York: Nancy Paulsen Books. 32 pp. Ages 2 to 6.

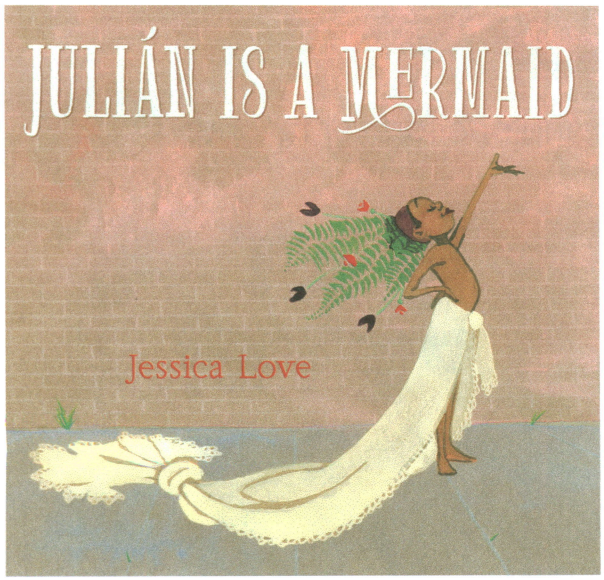
It's hard for a monster and a boy to have a playdate. Sure, they love racing cars, dressing up as pirates, and building towers. But the monster, true to his nature, secretly wants to eat his playmate, adding a bit of a wrinkle to the afternoon!

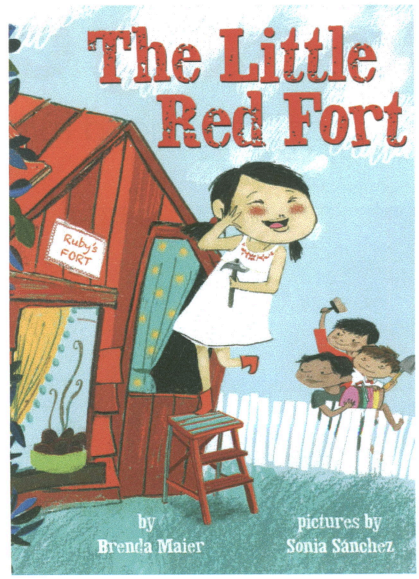
This humorous book for young children is just a little scary and still plenty sweet. It speaks to the inner monster in all of us, teaching us how to manage our selfish, brutish impulses so we can nurture and enjoy good relationships. The rhythm of the text is perfect for reading aloud. The funny stuff here goes far beyond one-liners; it has depth that readers will connect with again and again.

About the authors

Isabel Baker, MAT, MLS, is president of The Book Vine for Children, a national company dedicated to getting good books into the hands of preschool children and their teachers. Isabel has worked as a children's librarian and is currently a presenter on early literacy and book selection.

Miriam Baker Schiffer, MFA, is a writer in Brooklyn, New York. She consults on book selections for The Book Vine, in McHenry, Illinois. Miriam's children's book, *Stella Brings the Family,* was published by Chronicle Books in 2015.





Julián Is a Mermaid

By Jessica Love. 2018. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press. 40 pp. Ages 3 to 8.

Jessica Love, a Broadway actor who makes a stunning debut here as an author and illustrator, brings to life a story of acceptance and unconditional love. Set against the very real backdrop of the New York City subway, young Julián spots women dressed as mermaids while riding the train with his grandmother. The women inspire a rich fantasy, which continues at home: while his abuela is taking a bath, Julián fashions a mermaid skirt for himself out of one of her curtains, and he constructs a flowing headdress out of fronds from her fern plant. But the look on his abuela's face when she steps out of the bath is severe, springing the book back to reality.

Is she angry about how Julián misappropriated the items he used to make his costume? Or worse, does she disapprove of his feminine look? After a moment of great tension, his abuela hands him a necklace to complement his outfit.

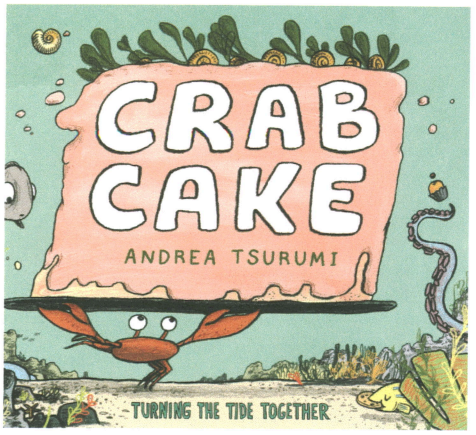
Love's skillful illustrations celebrate feeling beautiful and confident in our own bodies. This is an important and finely crafted book.

The Little Red Fort

By Brenda Maier. Illus. by Sonia Sánchez. 2018. New York: Scholastic Press. 40 pp. Ages 4 to 7.

In this modern take on *The Little Red Hen*, a female protagonist named Ruby heads for the toolshed and takes on the task of building a wooden fort from planks and nails. Her brothers doubt whether she can do it and offer no help. So Ruby drafts the plans, gathers the supplies, cuts the boards, and hammers the nails herself. We love that the illustrations show Ruby's mother and grandmother quietly supporting her by offering a steady hand on the saw and hammering in a few nails.

When it's time to play in the fort, Ruby's brothers need a way to redeem themselves so they can join in too. Thankfully, because a homeowner's work is never done, there are plenty of jobs to go around. The layered illustrations are made from recycled paper, charcoal pencil, pen, gouache, and brushstrokes. They feel lighthearted, yet Sánchez expertly conveys subtle moods.



Crab Cake: Turning the Tide Together

By Andrea Tsurumi. 2019. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 48 pp. Ages 4 to 8.

As awareness grows about how much garbage humans are dumping into the oceans, this book drives the message home by looking at it from the ocean dwellers' perspectives. The book opens by introducing happy creatures cohabitating in the watery wild, mixing in fish facts with a bit of silliness—including a crab that likes to bake. But the peppy mood changes when humans dump a boatload of garbage into the fish's home. The underwater landscape turns dark and gloomy, and no one knows what to do. Except for crab.

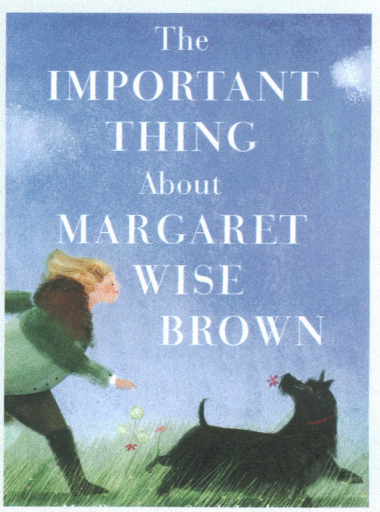
Crab bakes a cake, and it brings the fish and other sea creatures together. Then, they hatch a plan to give the humans their just desserts in an unexpected and humorous ending. This powerful tale is an antidote to the "out of sight, out of mind" affliction many of us have when it comes to the environment.

Forever Favorites

In each issue we feature a classic book to (re)introduce teachers to old favorites. Or, in this case, something delightful to illuminate the classics.

The Important Thing About Margaret Wise Brown

By Mac Barnett. Illus. by Sarah Jacoby. 2019. New York: Balzer + Bray. 42 pp. Ages 6 to 10.



Margaret Wise Brown (*Goodnight Moon*, *The Runaway Bunny*, *Big Red Barn*) is queen of the classic picture book. And now, a stunning picture book has been created that is all about her. This poetic biography dives into the questions of what makes authentic storytelling, why good children's books are important, and why Brown's are uniquely so. Mac Barnett dazzles with his creative homage to a woman who was a genius for intuiting how to communicate with young children. Sarah Jacoby's gentle, bright-eyed illustrations evoke the 1940s and Brown's hopeful energy.

Brown's books were initially considered to be edgy and untoward—the nation's preeminent children's librarian of the day marked them as "NOT RECOMMENDED," keeping them off the shelves of libraries around the country. Thankfully, Brown had the support of a visionary editor, Ursula Nordstrom, at Harper & Row.

While this book is for primary-grade children, it is essential reading for teachers who share Brown's books day in and day out with young children of all ages.

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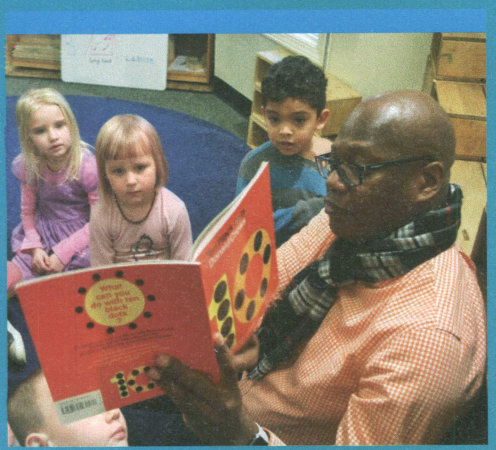

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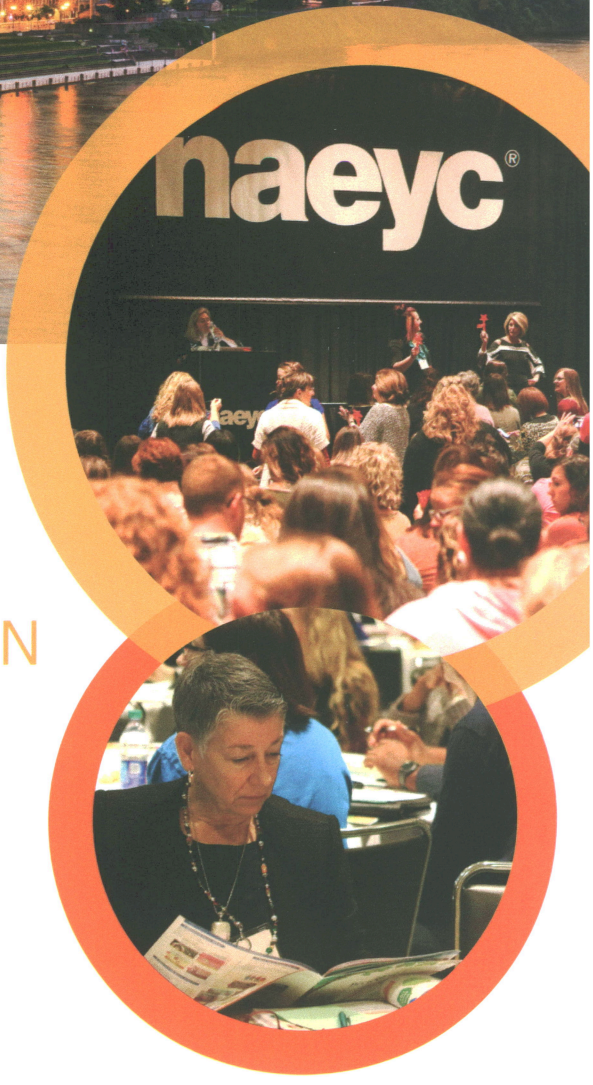

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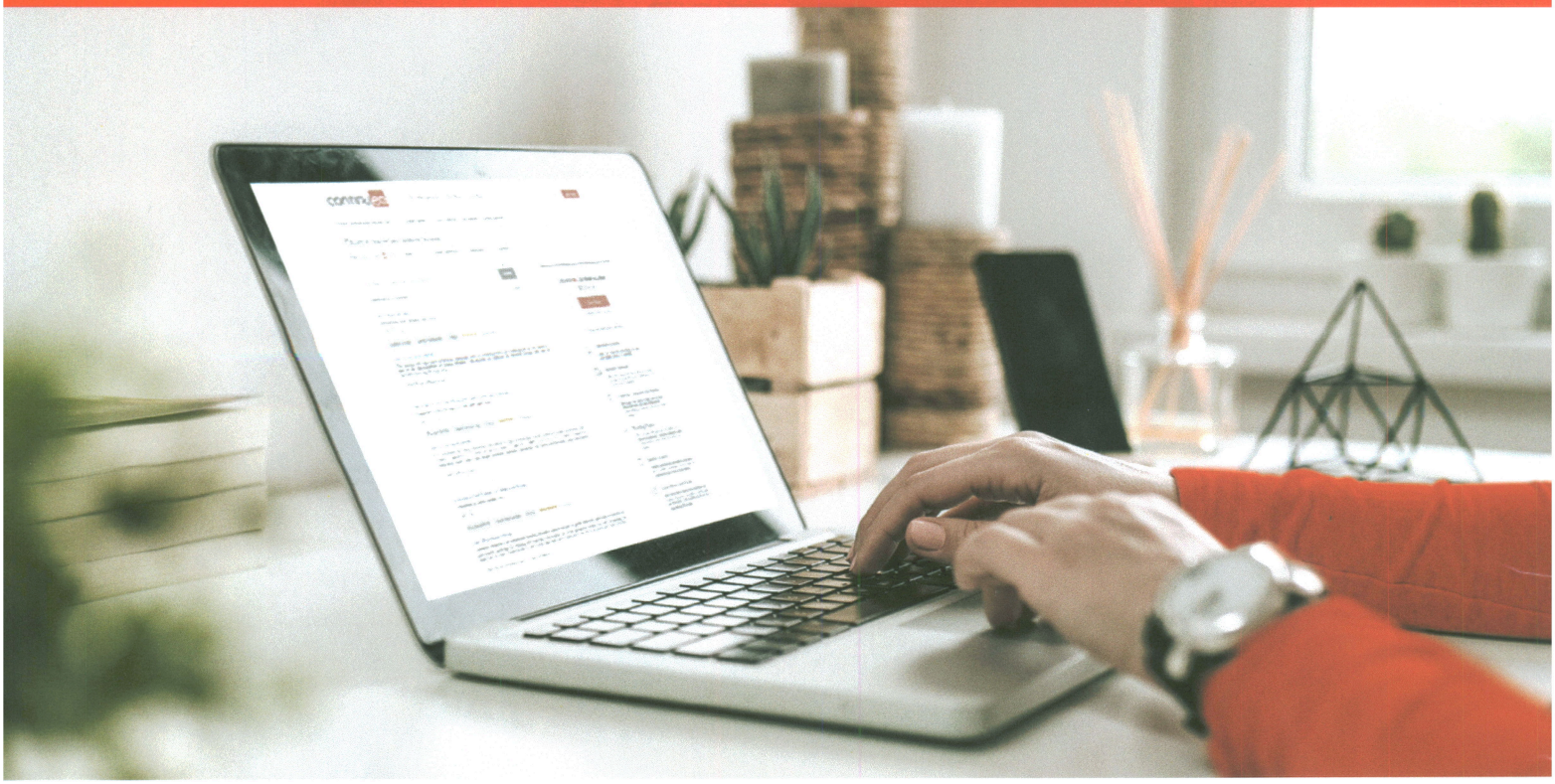

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